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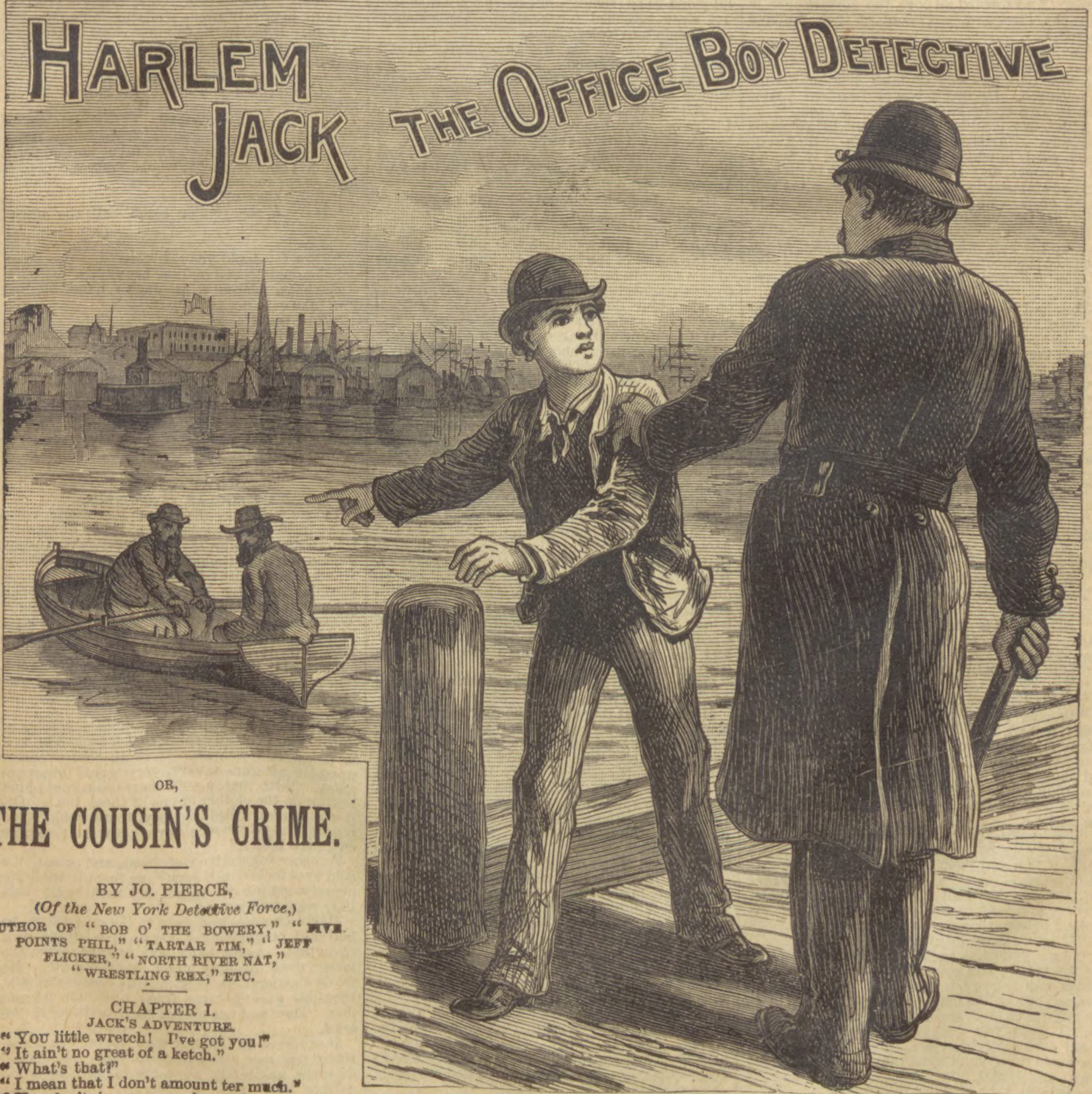
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OR,
THE COUSIN'S CRIME.

BY JO. PIERCE,
(Of the New York Detective Force.)
AUTHOR OF "BOB O' THE BOWERY," "AVE
POINTS PHIL," "TARTAR TIM," "JEFF
FLICKER," "NORTH RIVER NAT,"
"WRESTLING REX," ETC.

CHAPTER I.
JACK'S ADVENTURE.
"You little wretch! I've got you!"
"It ain't no great of a ketch."
"What's that?"
"I mean that I don't amount ter much."
"You don't, in one way; in another way, you
do. You boys have worried the life out of me."

THE POLICEMAN SHOOK HIS PRISONER ROUGHLY. "IT AIN'T ME!" EXCLAIMED JACK.
"THAT CHAP IS RUNNIN' AWAY. STOP HIM!"

and I'm going to make an example of you. I'll take you into my dissecting room, and use you as a 'subject.'

"I'd rather you wouldn't, but I like ter oblige my feller-men. Ef it'll do ye any great amount o' good, go ahead. People must be amoused, an' you don't look as though you ever had much fun, anyway. I'll help you out—let's be jolly. I don't like the idee o' bein' dissected, but I reckon I kin stand it. Never say die!"

The scene was in Harlem. Several boys had been playing ball in a vacant lot when the "delusive sphere" was batted over a high board fence into the back yard of a neighboring house.

The boys' first impression was that the ball was irrevocably lost. The fence was so high that it was hard to scale, and they knew something about the owner of the house. He was known as Doctor Otis Harbison, but was not a practicing physician. Little was known about him except that he was engaged in chemical experiments for some reason unknown.

He was not a popular man. He associated but little with those of his own age, and then only when they met casually, and none of his neighbors had ever been invited to his house. He had visitors, now and then, but nobody on the block knew who they were, nor whence they came. And toward all boys the chemist-doctor had the strongest aversion, if not positive hatred.

Having had unpleasant experience with Harbison, none of the boys were willing to go after the lost ball, but one of their number finally volunteered. He was a boy of fourteen years, who was generally known as Happy Jack.

After considerable effort he managed to climb the fence. Harbison's house had a rather spacious yard, in which grew fruit-trees, roses and other flowers, and the whole served to make a kind of ambuscade. Happy Jack saw the ball on an open walk, but, though he looked carefully, did not see any human being.

He dropped inside the yard, and was about to pick up the ball when he found himself in the grasp of the doctor.

Then followed the conversation before recorded.

Jack had been a little startled at first, for he not only knew that Harbison was a man of violent temper, but there was a vague notion among the boys that he was possessed of supernatural powers which he was inclined to use for evil. The boy would not have credited such a theory in his calmer moments, but the doctor did startle him for a moment. When he recovered his coolness, and expressed himself so lightly, he made matters all the worse. He was with a man who could not appreciate good humor.

The old chemist raised his heavy stick threateningly.

"I've a good mind to flog you!" he declared, angrily.

"Why should you?" Jack asked. "Have I done any harm ter your place?"

"What business had you to come in here?" The stick was shaken menacingly over the boy's head.

"All I want is that ball," explained Happy Jack, pointing to the cause of the whole trouble.

"Is it your ball?"

"Yes, sir."

"What business has *your* ball in *my* yard?"

"It was batted in here by accident. We want it, bad, an' I thought I wouldn't do no harm by comin' quietly in after it. I ain't touched nothin' else, an' I won't. Don't think I'd damage yer fruit-trees, nor nothin' else, fur I wouldn't. You see it's a straight bill, doctor, an' all that we boys want is the ball. We want ter be jolly."

"I'll make you 'jolly' in a way you won't like, you young rascal!" sharply retorted Harbison. "You and your gang have been worrying the life out of me. You get into that vacant lot, and you play ball and howl like maniacs. I've complained to the police, but not an arrest; I believe they are in league with you."

"They do drive us away—"

"And you come back. I know *boys* as well as any man. You play over there, defying law, order and decency, but when a patrolman appears, your ball is hidden and you are as mute as mice until he is gone. Then you begin again. Oh! I know you and your ways; I know just what creatures boys are. I've been thinking for some time that I must take the law into my own hands, and now I'll do it. You had no business to come into my yard."

"We only wanted the ball."

"Don't interrupt me. I don't care a picayune

for you or your ball; I only know that you have come in here like a thief. It is one of a series of inflictions put upon me by your gang—"

"What have we done?"

"Played ball over there."

"Is that *your* lot?"

"No, but the noise of your yelling and hooting comes into my rooms and drives me crazy when I work."

The old man paused for a moment, and then a cunning gleam came into his eyes.

"Come up into my room, and see how plainly I can hear," he added.

"Don't think I want ter go," Jack quickly answered, remembering the reputation borne by Harbison, and not at all reassured by the tall, lank, unprepossessing figure, and shrunken, crafty face of the man, himself.

"Why not?"

"Time is money, mister, you know."

"Nonsense! Come, why do you hesitate? Let me appeal to your better nature. Come to my room, and see for yourself how plainly every sound rises to my hearing."

The old man had lowered his stick, and he had assumed a manner intended to be mild and persuasive, but this change did not reassure Jack, nor did he admire the smile which had appeared on the chemist's face. That smile, too, was intended to be friendly, but Harbison's face did not seem intended for smiling. The attempt only made him look hideous.

"Thank you," the boy answered, "but I reckon I'll be excused. You tol' me only a bit ago that you'd take me ter your dissectin'-room, an' use me fur a subjick."

"All empty talk; I was angry, then. Besides, I have no dissecting-room, and have not seen a 'subject' for twenty years. Don't be foolish. I want to appeal to your better nature, and you need not stay five minutes. See! the windows are open. Will you go?"

Happy Jack had not gained a good opinion of Doctor Harbison, but he had got over his first startled sensation, and the doctor's proposal reminded him that a chance was now offered to see the inside of the house. He had but a vague idea what was inside, but, as Harbison was said to be a chemist engaged in experiments, instead of a regular doctor, he had an idea that his quarters must be strange and marvelous.

With his curiosity aroused, he made answer:

"All right; heave ahead. I like ter be jolly."

"Good! Come on!"

The old man walked stiffly down the walk toward the house and Jack followed. If the latter had been ten years older he might have seen something very strange and suspicious in the chemist's sudden change from unreasoning anger to plausible and would-be pleasant words, but Jack did not think of it then.

He had occasion to think of it afterward, for the memory of the terrors of the chemist's house would never leave him while life lasted.

The yard of the house, with its fruit-trees and flowers, was a pleasant place, but Jack thought that all this vanished when he entered the house. It was furnished scantily and gloomily. Not an unnecessary thing was visible where they went, and the same rule would apply to the whole house, except the doctor's experimental rooms. Cheap, dull-colored carpets were on the floor and the furniture, what there was of it, was stiff, grim and plain.

On the whole, the house was about as cheerful as an empty dry-goods case.

Harbison led the way to the rear room of the third, and upper floor. This was a large room, and there was no scarcity of articles. Happy Jack saw more than he could ever remember afterward. He saw as many bottles and jars as a druggist's shop could boast of, and all were of the same appearance as those in a drug store. Besides these, there were dozens of instruments new and strange to the boy. They nearly covered a long table; they stood upon shelves and on the floor; they seemed to be everywhere.

Taken in connection with Harbison's reputation, and his peculiar appearance, all these peculiar things made a strong impression on Jack's mind. He was awed—almost frightened—but when he saw a dog and cat lying close together on the floor, and apparently asleep, he took courage.

The old chemist could not be a very bad man if he was so fond of household pets.

The boy had hesitated at the door, but he now walked in boldly. Harbison sat down near the window and pointed to another chair, which the visitor readily occupied. There was a moment's silence, during which the two looked curiously at each other.

They presented a strong contrast.

Jack had a fresh, boyish, frank and manly

face, and a plump, healthy figure. Not being rich, his clothes were very plain, but they were whole and clean, and he presented a pleasant appearance.

Harbison was well along in years; his figure was bent, emaciated, and shrunken; his beardless face was thin, pale, and extremely wrinkled; his garments were ill-fitting and slovenly and his expression was cold, crafty and cruel.

It was not a pleasant picture, and the visitor's gaze wandered away.

"Boy, what is your name?" the chemist suddenly asked.

"Happy Jack," was the absent reply.

"How?"

"Oh! my name is John Brandrege, but they sometimes call me Happy Jack 'round here, or Harlem Jack, ef they take a notion."

"Where do you live?"

"D'ye see the wooden house 'way over thar, by the new flats goin' up?"

"Yes."

"I live thar."

"With your parents?"

"With my mother. Father is dead."

"Do you like chemical experiments?"

"Don't know anything about them. Can't say I think I should, though; can't see anything jolly about them."

"There is fascination. Just fancy a man inventing new mixtures—studying them out, day by day. Look in the smallest case! Those are all compounds of my own; things to which I, and I alone, have the secret. I use no technical terms, for you would not understand."

"Should think you would git blowed up, by gracious."

"I am an expert chemist. What man can do I can do. Observe the jar with the yellow label. Put one drop of that on this table, and strike it with a hammer, and it would make a sound as loud as the report of a revolver."

"Julius Caesar!"

"Do you see yonder black ball, the size of your fist?"

"Yes."

"How far could you throw it?"

"'Twould depend on how heavy 'tis."

Harbison placed it in Jack's hand, bidding him take care not to drop it.

"Now then?"

"I could throw it a hundred feet, I reckon."

"As far as yonder group of boys?"

"Yes."

"Were you to do so now it would kill every one of them. It is a deadly explosive, which does its work by concussion. The lives of those boys are in your grasp at this moment, but of course, you will not throw it. They have done you no injury."

CHAPTER II.

A SINGULAR EXPERIENCE.

THERE was a peculiarity of Harbison's voice as he spoke these words which, taken in connection with the words, themselves, gave Happy Jack a startling thought. The group of boys to which the chemist referred stood upon the vacant lot used for ball-playing, and, in Harbison's opinion, the boys *had* done him injury. Was not every word of his last few sentences a hint that he could at any time kill all of the boys if he wished?

The cold, gray eyes were bent upon Jack's face for a few seconds; then the doctor put the black ball away and pointed to another object.

"Yonder," he resumed, "you see a species of gun. You probably think that it looks odd, and it is an odd weapon. It is an improvement upon the air-gun—a very, very great improvement. With that, a good marksman could hit a button on the clothes of one of those boys. Or, if the bullet killed the boy, there would be no report, and no one would ever know from whence came the bullet."

Another suggestive statement, and again the cold eyes looked into Jack's, as though to drive every word into his mind, and make sure that they were understood.

Harbison arose and went to the case which, he had said, contained the compounds of his own invention. As his back was toward Jack, the latter used his eyes upon other objects. He made a general, swift survey of the room, and then his gaze became fixed upon the cat and dog. They had not moved their position in the least.

It occurred to the boy that there was something peculiar about the animals. He could discover absolutely no signs of life; he could neither hear them breathe, nor see their sides move with respiration. There were no nervous contractions of their limbs, such as are so often

seen in their species when asleep, nor did their position seem easy and natural. If they had been carved animals they could not have lain there more rigidly and silently.

Happy Jack shivered, and was happy no longer. He remembered having been told that men who experiment with drugs use cats, dogs and other animals as subjects upon which to try their "experiments." He tried not to remember all that he had been told on this subject, but he could not help staring blankly at the two animals and wondering what condition they were in.

Were they sleeping naturally? Or was life suspended for the time? Or were they really dead?

If the latter was the true explanation life could not long have been gone, for only by their rigidity and utter lack of motion did they appear lifeless.

With an effort he turned his gaze away; turned it toward the window, as the only place in the room free from the doctor's contamination. As he did so something else caught and held his attention for a moment—a card which lay upon the table close to his elbow.

A name was printed upon it, and he read it mechanically:

"ROLAND ANDERSON."

It was a name new to him then, and the card interested him but a moment; but he was destined to remember it at no distant period with increased interest.

Harbison was still busy at the case. He had taken down a small jar which was filled with some article which seemed to require great care in the way of protection, for it was so tightly secured that he found it difficult to open it. He had moved a little to one side, so that Jack had a better view of the case, and his attention at once became fixed.

At the end of the shelf stood a bottle which would hold at least a pint of whatever was in it, while beside it were half a dozen very small bottles of the same color. They were blue, and the only blue bottles in the case. And such a blue! Jack was never able to describe it afterward, except to say that it was the most brilliant color he had ever seen.

It had a depth, a dark radiance, a sparkle which was simply wonderful. And all the bottles mentioned, large and small, were of the same peculiar blue.

But there was something more. A label was pasted on the largest bottle, and the boy read the single word:

"POISON!"

Harbison turned around with the jar which he had at last succeeded in opening, and approached Jack. The latter's nostrils were greeted with a strong odor which was something like that of vinegar.

"Another of my mixtures," the doctor proceeded. "It is very powerful, but requires to be kept away from air as much as possible. Observe its effects!"

He had placed a thick piece of cotton cloth on the table, and he now allowed a few drops of the liquid in the jar to fall upon it. The effect was at once apparent. Wherever a drop of the liquid had fallen the cloth began to change, to lose its firmness, and then it slowly disappeared until every drop was marked by a hole eaten cleanly through. But the end was not yet; the drug continued to eat, the holes enlarging and drawing nearer each other, until it was plain that all the cloth would be consumed.

"A favorite preparation of mine," observed Harbison. "Vitriol is nearest like it. My compound will eat up more than cloth; it will eat human flesh. Were you to dip your hand in this jar, your hand would be ruined. Were you to go into the yard and throw any of this liquid upon the group of boys, what do you think would become of them?"

Again the sly suggestion!

Jack looked up and met Harbison's gaze. The chemist was looking at him with glittering eyes, and his parted lips revealed long, white teeth which somehow reminded Jack of a shark's. But the man's expression was even worse; it was angry, threatening and sinister, and the boy felt sure that he had been taken there to be frightened, to be shown the old chemist's power, and shown how easily he could wreak vengeance upon the boys who annoyed him, if he saw fit.

A shiver passed over Jack's frame; if Harbison wished to frighten him, he had succeeded perfectly.

"I think I'll go!" muttered Jack.

"What! so soon?"

"Yes; I've got business."

Harbison laughed. Plainly it was a laugh caused by real mirth, but the sound was strange and unpleasant.

"Don't you like my room?"

"No!" was the prompt confession.

"I've a good many other wonders here."

"I don't want ter see 'em."

"I thought all boys were full of curiosity?"

"They may be; I dunno."

Jack's reply was as curt as it was non-committal. Harbison's eyes twinkled with satisfaction.

"I hope you've enjoyed your visit?"

"Hugely. How could I help it?"

"The only trouble here is that one of my compounds may at any moment explode and blow us all up."

"I s'pose so. Fine place ter live in. So is Sing Sing, ef a man likes it. I shouldn't."

"I hope you won't get arrested for any evil act and sent there. So you're ready to go. All right; go out, get your ball and go away. I hope the ball will not fall in my yard again, and that when you boys come near, you will not screech like demons. I don't want my life made hideous. Bear this in mind, and let me alone in future. If you don't, it may be the worse for you!"

The chemist's evil nature had broken loose at last. He threw off the thin mask of amiability, and while his voice rung out sharply and peevishly, he looked at the boy with an expression of malignant hatred. His will was good enough at that moment to use some of his villainous compounds to Jack's eternal discomfort, to say the least.

He had, however, taken just the course to revive his companion's courage. His threats and his anger drew Jack's mind from the unknown dangers of the room, and he faced Harbison as boldly as it was his nature to face all open dangers.

"We won't argue the pint," he coolly replied. "I told you out in the yard that I wouldn't hurt yer things, nohow, an' it's the same with all the boys. As fur the noise we make, 'tain't done ter worry nobody, an' I'm sorry anybody is worried. That's all I've got ter say."

Harbison seemed upon the point of speaking, but suddenly changed his mind and pointed silently to the door.

Jack was more than willing to go. He went, but, as he did so, glanced again at the dog and cat. They had not stirred a foot. Were they dead or alive? Or were they dead in life? Once more Jack shivered, and he went out with quick steps. The chemist followed him to the yard; the ball was secured; and the boy, declining Harbison's aid, climbed over the fence once more. As he reached the top his late host broke the silence:

"Go!" he sternly ordered, "and never dare come near my yard again!"

"Ef I never go visitin' until I call on you ag'in, I shan't visit any more this week," coolly replied Jack. "I'd sooner visit the Morgue."

And then he dropped into the vacant lot.

The boys with whom he had been playing ball had gone away, and he was not sorry; he no longer felt like indulging in such pastime. Night was drawing near, and he walked toward home, his mind dwelling upon his late adventures. He unhesitatingly set Doctor Otis Harbison down as a dangerous man, and felt sure that the man would be glad to injure the boys with any one of the means at his disposal which he had shown. Whether he would really do so was another question. There is, fortunately, a power which puts restraint upon the dangerous passions of men disposed to evil, and its name is—the Law!

Whether this would keep Harbison in check, or whether he would commit some crime to gratify his spite, was not to be known; but Jack clearly saw that he was dangerous.

With his facilities for doing harm, he might do it in a secret way, perhaps, and never be found out.

Jack's mind wandered back to the motionless cat and dog, and he could not avoid a shiver. Having a lively sympathy for such animals, he could not help dwelling upon the unfortunate pair in the doctor's room. Dead or alive? Again he asked the question, and again he felt sure that they had been living. But why had they been stretched out there like two statues? What villainous experiments was Harbison trying upon them?

The boy tried to forget all about them, but what he had seen not only haunted his mind for the time, but future events were destined to brand them more indelibly upon his mind, and recall circumstances which he had thought of no importance at the time.

Jack and the old chemist had not by any means met for the last time, and the future had that in store for one of them which was as strange as it was weird, startling and dangerous. A series of painful events had begun.

CHAPTER III.

A PROPOSAL TO JACK.

AFTER supper Jack left the house and went two blocks away to make a call. The dwelling he sought was as humble as any to be found in New York, being no more than a shanty which stood upon a rocky elevation—a species of habitation common in the metropolis a few years ago, but now fast giving place to improved edifices.

This shanty had never known the touch of paint, and time had not only given the rough boards a desolate appearance, but they were giving away in places, suffering for want of the aid of hammer and nails; and the once-direct lines of the building, as a whole, had given place to curves and abrupt angles, as it "sagged" here and there. The chimney was a stove-pipe, and the only window not over two feet square.

Desolate as it looked, the shanty was the home of a man as happy as he was poor, and as honest as he was happy. All three qualities he possessed to the extreme.

His name was G. W. Grimm. Whether the initials stood for George Washington, or something else, he allowed nobody to know. He was ready to announce a part of his name frequently, but never to tell the whole.

Ceremony was not practiced at the shanty, and when Jack arrived, he promptly swung back the battered door which hung on one hinge only. A man sat by an old box which served as his table, and on which now set the kerosene-lamp.

He looked up, saw Jack, and then his face brightened and a medley of words and strange sounds passed his lips.

"Hullo, Happy Jack! Come in—come in! Glad ter see ye. Bow-wow-wow! Bow-wow-wuff-wuff!"

He finished his salutation with a most surprising imitation of the barking of a dog. It was not accurate to an extreme, but it was vehement, and the "barks" followed each other from his lips with surprising rapidity.

"Good-evenin'," replied Jack, neither surprised nor excited. "How be ye ter-night?"

"Bad! I tell ye, me boy, you don't know what it is ter hev chronic hydrophoby sarcularin' in yer veins. Of all melancholy cases, mine is the melancooliest. Bit by a ravin', howlin', devourin' mad-dog twenty year ago, I've had the chronic hydrophoby ever sence. Bow-wow-wow! The fever in my veins is awful, an' my flesh is burnin' up. Feel, an' see how hot 'tis!"

Jack had sat down on a dilapidated chair near his host, and he now gravely obeyed the latter's request. He found Grimm's band of normal temperature, just as he had expected he should, but made answer:

"It's pooty hard, by Cæsar! I'm sorry for ye."

"Thank—bow-wow—thank ye. Sympathy is sweet ter one 'flicted as I—bow-wow—be."

And he shook his head very solemnly.

There was not a more healthy-looking man in New York, and appearances did not belie him. He was healthy, and he knew it, but he was a man of many oddities. He never allowed a friend to rap at his door, and always reproved a stranger for doing so; he allowed no one to call him "Mr. Grimm," and told no more of his name than has been mentioned, and it was his fancy to insist that he was a victim to hydrophobia, contracted years before, and now become "chronic."

Of course this absurd pretense was believed by no one. Probably G. W. Grimm did not expect any one to believe it, but he *did* require his friends to keep up the pretense he had started, and the person who expressed want of belief, or laughed at him, straightway ceased to be his friend.

They must treat him as a victim to "chronic hydrophobia," or keep away from him.

Few, however, ever lost his friendship when they had once gained it. He was slow to admit any one to his confidence, and when he did, his honesty, kindness, and good humor generally held them as fast friends. He lived in the shanty all alone, doing all his work, but he seemed as well satisfied as though he was a millionaire with many servants at his back.

Having paid due attention to his "infirmities," he turned to another subject.

"I expect Harvey Stannard here this evenin'."

"De ye?" asked Jack. "I ain't seen 'im fur a week. How's he comin' on?"
 "All right, I reckon."
 "Still likes his place?"
 "Yes."

Jack remained thoughtfully silent, and Grimm added:

"I guess you'll have ter give up your idee."
 "What idee?"
 "About Harv an' his new place."
 "Wal, I hope I'm wrong."
 "I don't see why you suspect anything."
 "I've tol' ye all about it once, Grimm, but I'll go over the ground ag'in. I hope I'm wrong, an' that Harvey has a good job. He come here a mighty green country chap, an' when he see the advertisement fur a secretary he was so skeered he dassent go ter 'ply for it alone, so I went as fur as the door an' waited fur him."

"When he come out his face was all lit up with joy, an' he said he'd got the place; an' he felt so good he took me in an' we had ice-cream at his expense. He tol' me his story while we sat, but he was so excited he jumbled it up drefful, an' I thought 'twan't much matter's long as he'd got the job."

"We got through, an' while he's payin' the bill stepped out to the door. Next door was a cigar place, an' as I come out two men met in front on't, one havin' jest left the store with a fresh cigar. Says he ter t'other feller:

"'Hullo, Dickerman!' says he, 'what luck?'
 "'Good!' says t'other one; 'the feller is engaged, an' he's big enough fool ter suit even our purpose. Walk ter the club with me, an' I'll tell ye all about it.'"

"They went off, an' jest then Harvey come out."

"'Why,' says he, 'that's one o' the men who hired me.'"

"'Who is?' says I."

"'Him in the tall hat—Dickerman,' says he. 'I sorter grinned' then, fur all I thought on was what I'd heerd Dickerman say, and Harvey was a big, green chap, though not exactly a fool, as the feller had said. Then it struck me as odd that Dickerman should hire anybody willin', and then call him a fool. 'He's big enough fool ter suit even our purpose,' he had said. What had be'n their purpose?"

"You've often tol' me I am too s'pishous, Grimm, an' too ready ter see crooked things whar none reelly be. Wal, I did suspect right away that Harvey had been hired by somebody who wanted him ter do ugly work fur them—by sharpers. So I axed more on him, and he went over the story ag'in."

"Yes, yes; I know," Grimm answered. "He seen the advertisement fur a secretary, an' got the job, an' found his bosses rich an' fine as silk."

"Maybe, maybe!" coolly replied Jack. "But when Dickerman called Harvey a fool—"

"Mebbe you mistook his words."

"Harvey said thar was over twenty arter the place besides him, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"An' one fine-lookin' chap agreed ter work fur his board an' clothes?"

"Yes, but—"

"Wait, Grimm! It's likely nigh about all o' them twenty was New Yorkers, an' all was business chaps, Harvey said. Now, why was they all dismissed, an' Harvey took, when he's so green, an' never had no experience?"

"He's honest, Harvey is, an' his face shows it."

"A face is a pooty fair guide as ter honesty, though you can't bet on't always; but one thing you kin bet on when you see Harvey. He's green an' he's innocent, confidin' an' simple-minded. Now, Cordova, the man he was to work fur, didn't want him, but Dickerman, Cordova's cousin, stuck to it Harvey was just what was wanted, an' he carried the day. Now, I say there was somethin' mighty queer about the way Harvey was hired."

It is a peculiarity of all of us that as we argue our opinions grow stronger and mere obstinate. Opposition stirs them up, and often we go into an argument with only languid interest, and come out zealous, stubborn supporters of the cause we have championed. So it was with Happy Jack. If Grimm had not opposed him his vague theory might have been forgotten long before, but they had argued it long enough to stir the boy up and make him determined in his views.

Grimm scratched his head doubtfully, and then there was brief silence. It was broken by the sound of footsteps outside the shanty, and then the door was again opened and a young man appeared.

"'Hullo! hullo!' quoth Grimm. 'Here's

Harv. Lad, you're welcome. Tumble in, but look out fur the dog. Bow-wow-wow! Just so, by gracious! Bow-wow-wow!"

"I see you've got them again," answered the new-comer.

"I have, an' I've always got them. I'm a victim o' chronic hydrophoby; I'm a mad-dog with a man's body onter me. I'm a victim, an' my temperature—bow-wow!—is high. Set down, Harv; set down. Use that box."

The latest visitor obeyed, but Grimm's sharp eyes were not long in noticing one thing.

"You ain't in yer usual speerits. What's up?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Come ter the p'int, Mr. Harvey Stannard. No beatin' around the bush. Come ter the p'int."

"I will. Harlem Jack, I've got a job for you."

"A which for me?"

"A job, if you want it."

"Where?"

"With my employer, Edward Cordova."

Happy Jack whistled softly. Dropping his chin upon his hands, and his elbows upon his knees, he stared steadfastly at young Stannard.

"I say, be they goin' ter start a Brazilian colony?"

"No; but Mr. Cordova wants another employee. He was used to them in Brazil, and he wants them—I mean, enough to help him along all right."

"He's got you an' that swarthy Pedro, already. Is he sech a helpless critter he needs three men ter take care on him?"

"Mr. Cordova is not in good health now, and this accounts for the call for another servant. He has asked me to bring a smart, capable boy, and I know of nobody but you. I feel sure you will suit him, and it would be a good place. Will you go and let him see you? I know he'll like you, and offer you the place. Will you take it?"

CHAPTER IV.

AN EVENTFUL STEP.

HAPPY JACK looked at Stannard with a twinkle in his eyes which that gentleman did not understand. He had been surprised, and, also, he was somewhat excited at seeing the chance offered to enter a house which had perplexed him; but a new thought had entered his mind and was responsible for the twinkle in his eyes.

Remembering Dickerman's uncomplimentary reference to Harvey, this thought was in his mind: "Be they lookin' fur another fool?" He had had delicacy enough never to tell Harvey of this speech of Dickerman's, and he would not break the reserve then. Harvey was too good a fellow to have his feelings injured maliciously.

A big, strong young man of twenty-two was Stannard, and his round face was frank, good-humored and honest. That was about all that could be said for him. Harlem Jack had told the truth when he pronounced their friend "green." He had been brought up in the country, without any advantages, and a year in New York had not rubbed off the rough edges of his nature. This might never be done, for he was more honest and confiding than sharp.

"So Cordova wants a boy?" muttered Jack, after a pause.

"I told you so, didn't I?"

"Certain, certain. What does he want of him?"

"To run errands, and make himself generally useful; but the work will be light."

"Pedro is still there?"

A peculiar expression passed over Harvey's face.

"Yes," he replied.

"An' Neil Dickerman?"

"He don't live there, and never did, but he drops in about every day."

"Umph! He had a good 'eal ter say, Dick did, when you was engaged. Is he goin' ter be referee now?"

"I don't think he knows anything about it. It was a sudden thought of Mr. Cordova's; he wanted a boy for an errand, and had to get a messenger-boy. Then it occurred to him all at once to have a boy regular, and he spoke to me."

Happy Jack nodded sharply.

"I'll see Cordova to-morrow."

"That's good. I'd like to have you there."

"You still like Cordova?"

"He's a splendid fellow."

"An' Dickerman?"

"He's the same. He's a rich New Yorker, but I must say I never have seen a more pleasant gentleman. Cordova has always lived in

Brazil, and he is less likely to put on airs than a city man, I suppose."

"An' Pedro? Hope he don't feel above ye."

Stannard's face lengthened.

"Pedro is a queer chap," he answered.

"In what way?"

"I've told you before, you know, that he can't speak a word of English. Well, he is funny to an extreme. I never understood it fully, but it seems that he didn't like Dickerman from the first. I've seen him stand and watch his master and Dickerman when they talked, and you never saw such a dark, scowling, suspicious face. Then when Dickerman was gone, he'd question Cordova, for he couldn't understand a word they had said. Cordova is as gentle as a woman, and attached to Pedro, and he is always as patient as man can be, but I know the servant tried him a good deal when they talked in Spanish."

"How did he 'try' him?"

"I never could make out, but I think I got the idea to-day."

"Good!" Jack exclaimed. "What is it?"

"When I was coming away this afternoon Pedro met me outside the house. He had another Spaniard with him who could talk a little English—wretched English it was, too. Well, the other man said that Pedro wanted to ask me some questions, and he was to be interpreter. And then, good gracious! how they did fire questions at me!"

"What about?" eagerly asked Jack.

"All about business. You see, Cordova has been speculating under Dickerman's advice—"

"Ah!" muttered Jack.

"What?"

"Nothin'. Go on!"

"Speculating in Western mining stock and other things, and Dickerman says there is lots of money in it, but it seems that Pedro is suspicious. I was asked a thousand questions in barbarous English, but, to be brief, it amounted to this: Pedro wanted to know if the ventures were safe; if there was no danger of losing the money."

"What did ye tell him?"

"I had to tell him the truth—that I didn't know."

"How did they take it?"

"Pedro was very much disappointed. The amount of it is, he's terribly afraid his master is going to lose the money he has invested, and—I guess he hasn't any faith in Neil Dickerman."

Harlem Jack looked over at G. W. Grimm and nodded again knowingly.

"But you b'lieve in Dickerman?"

"He's a very pleasant, polite man."

"Umph! How is Cordova's money put out?"

"He's in various speculations, but the bulk of his money has gone into the Royal Bonanza Gold Mine."

"What's that?"

"A mine out in northern Idaho."

"Is it solid?"

"Dickerman says so."

"I didn't ask what Dickerman said. What do you say?"

"I don't know. I'm secretary, and I write all the letters, but I must say it's all Greek to me. I haven't mastered the technicalities of business, yet, and it's just like writing so much Choctaw," Stannard confessed.

"But Pedro is suspicious?"

"Yes, but he's an ignorant man, anyhow."

"Folks who ain't eddicated sometimes hev brains," sagaciously observed Jack.

"What do you keer about it?" interrupted Grimm.

"This 'ere conversation is too heavy fur us; let's drop it; it raises my temperature, an' sets the chronic hydrophoby ter work. Bow-wow-wow! Let's change the subjick."

"All right," Jack cheerfully agreed; "we'll do it. We'll be jolly. Never say die! We ain't goin' ter let no outside matters break up our sociables here, be we, Grimm?"

"Not ef we know it. Bow-wow!"

"Never say die!" quoth Jack, with enthusiasm.

"Who's got new 'sperience ter relate?" asked Grimm.

"Had any adventur's, Jack?"

The boy thought of Doctor Harbison, but something kept him from telling the events of the afternoon, remarkable as he considered them.

"Nothing thrillin'," he replied. "Tell us a story, G. W."

"Bow-wow! Don't keer ef I do, ef you kin stand it. The chronic hydrophoby is pooty bad, an' my temperature is high, but—bow-wow!—I kin still talk."

He told the story, and as they found it of in-

terest, the evening passed pleasantly. Stannard and Jack went home early. The latter did not forget Edward Cordova, and at the appointed time he presented himself at the house.

Cordova's father had been a Spaniard; his mother had been Annie Dickerman, aunt of Neil. They had married in New York, but had soon gone to Brazil. There their only child, Edward, was born. At twenty-one Edward found a fortune of half a million unreservedly at his disposal, both his parents being dead. Accepting an invitation by letter from his cousin, Neil, he came to New York, bringing with him the man Pedro, who had been in the service of the family ever since their Brazilian career was begun. Thanks to his mother, Cordova spoke English as well as he did Spanish, but Pedro did not know ten words of the former language.

Cordova had hired a fine house, and to this Happy Jack had gone to see him.

Ushered into the Brazilian's "office," so-called—it was the back parlor—this is what the boy saw: A well-furnished room, with two black-walnut desks. At one of these Harvey Stannard sat writing. By the other, Edward Cordova was reading a paper.

He was a slender young man, with black hair and eyes; a small, dark mustache; a dark face; and every outward indication which goes to mark the refined, sincere, unassuming gentleman.

Near him stood a man darker and stronger than he; a short, muscular man, with a coarse, strong and sensible face. Swarthy to an extreme, there was no softening of his Spanish characteristics with American blood, as in the case of Cordova. Such was Pedro.

Harvey Stannard looked up quickly, and then said:

"Mr. Cordova, this is young Jack Brandrege."

"Ah! I am glad to see you, young man. Pedro, place a chair for him near me. Mr. Stannard, pray resume your seat. We will all talk at our ease."

Mr. Cordova smiled and waved his hand. The smile was pleasant; the gesture was gentle; and his voice was as kind and courteous as though he had been addressing one of his own station. Happy Jack leaped to a conclusion and decided that the Spanish-American was a very fine man, and that he liked him.

"Well, my boy," he resumed, "do you think you would like a place here?"

"As errand-boy, sir?"

"Yes."

"I think so."

"I am told that you are a native of New York."

"So I be."

"Also, I dare say you are well acquainted about town?"

"I know ev'ry crook an' corner."

"Have you ever had a similar place?"

"No, sir."

"I suppose you can read and write?"

"The best proof o' that is ter let me try it."

"An excellent idea," answered Cordova, smiling. "Write my name on yonder piece of paper, and then read aloud some letter Mr. Stannard will show you."

Both tests were made, and Jack acquitted himself well. His eyes were not idle in the meanwhile, and he noticed that though Cordova betrayed only polite interest, and promised to be easily satisfied, Pedro watched him constantly, and with an appearance of intense interest.

Some further questions were asked and answered, and then the Brazilian expressed himself satisfied and formally engaged the boy, his service to begin immediately. Mr. Cordova insisted upon paying a week's wages in advance, and did so.

Just then another man entered the room. It was Neil Dickerman.

CHAPTER V.

DICKERMAN OBJECTS.

THE Brazilian looked up with his usual pleasant smile.

"Good-morning, Neil!" he said, genially.

"Good-morning, old boy! Hard at work, I see. How goes it, old fellow? Any new signs of riches? I expect to see this room stored with solid gold, yet."

And Mr. Neil Dickerman, a tall, slender, wiry man of twenty-eight years, bustled up to the desk and shook Cordova effusively by the hand.

"Don't build your hopes too high; you know I told you at the start that I was never intended for a financier."

"Nonsense!" somewhat hurriedly answered Dickerman. "Doubt is the enemy of success. Any letters?—By the way, who is this boy?"

He broke off suddenly and looked at Harlem Jack. Was there suspicion in his gaze? Rightfully or not, the boy thought so.

"An errand-boy I have just engaged," carelessly replied Cordova.

"How's that?" and Dickerman's face grew troubled.

"I needed an errand-boy; I engaged this lad not ten minutes ago."

Neil Dickerman leaned back in his chair. His manner expressed disagreeable surprise and anger, and a determination to "have it out" on the subject at once. His gaze traveled from Jack's face to his shoes, and then back again, in a slow, contemptuous way.

"Did you fish him out of the sewer?" he asked.

Jack smiled good-humoredly; Cordova frowned slightly, and replied:

"I beg that you will not speak in such a way. Young Brandrege comes recommended by Mr. Stannard."

"Not another importation from the country?"

"No; a New York boy."

"A Bowery tough, I should say."

"You don't approve of my choice, then?"

"No, I don't. Why didn't you consult me? I've never heard a word about your wanting a boy. Had I known you desired one, I could have got you a dozen—respectable boys, too."

Happy Jack smiled again.

"What are you grinning at, you ape?" demanded Neil.

"At you?" was the cool response.

"What do you see to grin about?"

"Your compliments," Jack serenely answered.

Dickerman turned to Cordova with a look of disgust.

"See here, Edward, do for Heaven's sake send this beggar tramping! I know New York boys, and you don't; and I can read them like a book. This fellow is a candidate for Blackwell's Island and Sing Sing, and he'll steal the shirt off your back if you don't send him flying."

Jack's smile broadened. Where most persons would have been justly indignant, he was saved by his good-humor; he was proving his right to be called "Happy" Jack. He felt, too, that he was beginning a struggle with Mr. Neil Dickerman which might end in important results, and was inwardly hoping devoutly that Cordova would stand by him.

His good-natured smile irritated Neil afresh, and that person sharply added:

"A fit face for the Rogues' Gallery, by Jupiter! I wonder at your taste, Edward. Send the young knave flying, and I'll get you a boy that will suit you in every way—a faithful, honest, industrious boy."

Cordova had been anxiously waiting for a chance to speak.

"I cannot send him away, if I would."

"Why not?"

"He is formally engaged."

"Ten minutes ago, I think you said."

"Yes."

"But has not entered upon his duties?"

"Wrong. His duties began at once. I have so informed him, and all arrangements are completed. He has received a week's pay—a trifling item, except that it proves that I have gone too far to retreat honorably. I have no desire to retreat. The boy suits me, and though I thank you for your—your friendly interest, I shall give him a trial. Bear in mind that I have not engaged a cashier or a bank president, but an errand-boy. I think that Jack and I will get on well together."

The speaker had looked annoyed and hurt. These expressions now vanished, and he smiled at Jack. Neil Dickerman did not smile; his face bore a scowl. Jack eyed him curiously. What would he do? Cordova, usually mild and yielding, had shown sudden, though polite firmness. For once, Neil could not prevail. How would he take his defeat?

The scowl suddenly left his face, and he assumed a light, careless manner.

"All right, old boy. It is your affair, not mine, and I hope you have got a jewel. The lad looks strong, willing and intelligent, and I dare say you'll like him well. Sharp fellows, our New York boys are; quick-witted, keen and alert. Your boy is very muscular for his size; he looks as though it would take a good one to down him."

All this while he had been looking approvingly at Jack. Turning to Cordova, he added:

"And now to business."

Jack had been asked for no reply, but he had given a mental verdict. It was in one brief word: "Gammon!" He already understood Dickerman well in some ways, if not in others. He had begun by calling Jack an "ape" and a "Bowery tough;" had declared that he was a candidate for "Blackwell's" and would "steal the shirt" off Cordova's back, if given a chance, and now he had turned around and poured hypocritical flattery upon him, hoping to win his good will.

He had lamentably failed. Happy Jack set him down as a knave, and it would require good proof to the contrary to change that opinion.

Cordova and Dickerman plunged into business; Harvey Stannard resumed writing; and only Jack and Pedro were idle. The former had for a time forgotten the latter, but as he suddenly looked around he found the Spaniard regarding him with the same strong, steady, intense gaze before noticed—an anxious gaze, Jack thought. The boy smiled and nodded, and Pedro's face abruptly cleared. It changed his whole appearance. Plain and heavy as his features were, he had an attractive face when that smile moved it.

"A pooty good sort o' a feller, I guess," thought Jack. "Pity he can't talk English."

Cordova and Dickerman passed the next hour in business conversation. Harlem Jack, while assuming a careless manner, listened attentively. A good deal that he heard was wholly unintelligible to him, because it was so loaded down with terms to be understood only by those who understand the mysteries of "stocks."

One thing he did make out, however: Cordova was disappointed because his previous investments had brought him in no proper returns, and, though a glittering bait was held before his eyes, he declined to make further investments at present.

Dickerman did not urge him, and Jack saw fresh cunning there. Cordova had the speculation fever, but he was not so badly afflicted that he was willing to risk all his fortune in a mad race to the gambler's goal. His American cousin had him on the hook, and was shrewd enough to give him ample line before trying to land him.

Such was Jack's theory. Possibly he was wholly wrong, and Dickerman was as honest as any man living, but it would take a good deal to quiet the suspicions aroused the day when Harvey Stannard was engaged.

Dickerman had said to his unknown friend, "The fellow is engaged, and he is big enough fool to suit even our purpose." These words referred to Harvey. Now, why did Dickerman want Cordova to have a "fool"—in other words, a stupid person—in his office? And what was the "purpose" to which he referred?

"Cordova is in the hands o' sharpers!" thought Harlem Jack, for the twentieth time.

Just then the servant announced a name at the door—only Dickerman having the privilege of free entrance.

"Roland Anderson!"

Jack was dimly conscious that he heard Cordova reply, but his attention had been attracted by something familiar in the name. "Roland Anderson!" Where had he heard it before?

The man entered. Young, rather good-looking, expensively dressed—evidently a specimen of New York's "young men about town." More than this, he was no stranger to Jack. The latter at once recognized him as the man to whom Dickerman had exultantly confided the opinion that Harvey was a fool.

He was cordially received, and Jack keenly noted the manner of each of the trio. Cordova was hospitable; Dickerman was rather indifferent; while Anderson, merely nodding to Neil, was evidently moved to treat Edward with a mixture of affability, warmth and deference.

"An old friend o' Dickerman's; a new friend o' t'other chap's," thought Jack. "I'm more'n ever fixed in my idee o' why an innocent, unexperienced, green country chap was wanted as secretary. Cordova is a pigeon, an' the hawks hev got him by the scruff o' his neck."

He shook his head gravely, and, turning once more met Pedro's gaze. And that gaze was as painfully eager and searching as ever. This time it rather startled Jack. He did not like to be looked at quite so sharply. True, Pedro's face was kindness itself, but his close attention was growing uncomfortable.

The boy looked back to the men by the desk. "Roland Anderson!" Where had he heard the name before? It was a puzzle, and he went back through the past, searching this event and that, but it was some time before he could place the name.

Then it flashed upon him suddenly.

He remembered Doctor Harbison's room, and the card he had seen upon the table. That card had borne the name, "Roland Anderson."

Jack's eyes brightened. The discovery pleased him, though it brought serious thoughts in its train. He had a horror of all things connected with the old chemist's room, and he would have doubted his best friend had he known that he was also the friend of Otis Harbison.

How, then, could he form any opinion of Anderson except a very unfavorable opinion?

Mr. Anderson became from that moment a marked man with Jack, and he was more than ever impressed with the idea that Edward Cordova, coming from the wilds of Brazil to New York, had fallen into evil company, and, what was worse, he was meeting his unknown dangers blindfolded. Plainly, he placed confidence in his cousin, and was wholly unsuspecting. Would anything short of his own ruin open his eyes?

CHAPTER VI.

THE ROYAL BONANZA MINING COMPANY.

THE day in the office reached its end at four o'clock. Dickerman and Anderson went away at once. The last hour would not have been devoted to the office had not Cordova expected a certain letter. It did not come, so Harvey was finally dismissed for the day. Their hours were very irregular. On some occasions the secretary worked less than one hour during the day; at other times he had five hours of writing and figuring.

When he went away on this particular day, Harlem Jack was out on an errand. When the boy came in, Pedro met him in the hall and handed him a card. On it were the following lines in Harvey's writing:

"All through for to-day, Jack. Go where you like. I would wait for you, but I have an engagement."

Jack read, and then, seeing Pedro's gaze fixed inquiringly on him, nodded to show that he understood.

Then Pedro did a peculiar thing. From under his coat he took a book. Opening it at random, he pointed to the printed lines, and then tapped his fingers on Jack's shoulder. His brows were raised questioningly.

"Do you want to know ef I kin read?" asked Jack. "Ef that's what you're drivin' at, I kin."

Pedro whipped out a second book, opened it, and revealed words strange to the boy. The latter suspected that they were in the Spanish language, and he was right. This time Pedro touched his own person, and then read several lines rapidly.

"Beautiful!" quoth Jack. "Smooth as ile, but I don't understand it no more'n I would Hottentot."

Pedro laughed, nodded abruptly, whisked the book under his arm, again opened the English book and shook his head mournfully.

"Jes' so," continued Jack. "You kin read Spanish, but not English, an' you're sorry you can't."

Pedro pointed to the book, pointed to Jack, then pointed to himself. Then his brows went up again.

"By Caesar! I b'lieve he wants me ter l'arn him ter read. Is that it, pard? Want ter git onto the intricacies o' the Yankee tongue, an' improve yer mind, eh? Good idee! You must feel lonesome—"

He stopped short.

"I'll bet a ham sandwich," he thought, "the chap wants ter learn so he kin understand what's goin' on in his master's office."

Pedro still maintained his questioning manner, and Jack nodded and smiled. Touching the book, he made answer:

"Yes, siree; I'll do it. I never s'posed I had any pertic'lar call ter be a schoolma'am, but when I see a foreign gent thirstin' fur inflammation—I mean information—it ain't in me ter refuse. I'll teach ye the A B C, an' Flea-biter-kapper, as they say in college, o' the United States language. We'll begin with the roodiments, Pedro, an' work up ter the highestatics. We will, sure pop, an' we'll be jolly. Never say die!"

Not a word of this could Pedro understand, but he comprehended that his request was granted, and shook Jack's hand with grateful zeal. After a few more gestures he put the book away, and the boy knew that he was free to go. He left the house at once.

"Poor old Pedro! He wants ter l'arn English so he kin understand what's goin' on in his master's office, but he might as wal spare hisself the pains. Before he kin understand respectable United States his master will be robbed o' all

his inheritance an' bric-a-brac, while as fur the lingo o' the speckerlation business, a college professor couldn't understand it unless he had been gamblin'."

Walking on mechanically, Jack meditated upon the situation at Cordova's. What he had seen there had added to the suspicions aroused by Harvey Stannard's peculiar engagement. He had had several competitors for the place, several of whom Cordova preferred to him. Dickerman, however, had insisted upon Stannard, and he had been engaged.

Why was he so anxious to have an inexperienced country youth? And why did he object to Happy Jack so strongly?

"Simply 'cause I'm a New Yorker, an' he was afeerd I would be fly enough ter ketch onto his tricks. He an' that Roland Anderson are bad ones. By the way, I wonder who Anderson is? I'd like ter know. Ef he's a friend o' Doc Harbison, he's liable ter be a bad one in dead earnest. Wonder who he is?"

Jack determined to satisfy this curiosity if he could. Entering a drug-store, he looked at a city directory. He gained no light, failing to find the name, so he went on toward home. The desire to gain the information increased after this failure, however, and it haunted his mind while he ate supper to such an extent that he determined to call upon Harvey Stannard and have the matter settled, if possible.

He carried out this idea at once, but Harvey could give him no points. Anderson was Dickerman's friend, but where he lived the secretary did not know. The latter's opinion of Anderson was favorable. True, he suspected him of being rather a fast young man, but that was nothing strange in New York. Anderson was "a pleasant young man," as Harvey expressed it, and that was enough to gain Harvey's good opinion.

Harlem Jack left the house and walked away. He was on the point of deciding to go to G. W. Grimm, and seek the lightness of spirits which that gentleman's good-humor usually brought about, when—lo! a familiar figure suddenly appeared near him.

It was Roland Anderson.

That gentleman, resplendent in a costly suit of clothes of the most approved pattern, a tall hat and an elaborate cane, was walking along with a light, brisk step.

Happy Jack whistled softly and fell in behind him. Anderson might be going to or away from home, but he was worth following. The pursuit led to the Third Avenue Elevated Road. Anderson mounted the steps; Jack did the same. Both took the down-train, the boy taking care not to get too near his man. The latter, however, took no notice of those around him.

He rode to Fourteenth street, and there left the train. Jack did the same. Descending to the street they walked west until Fourth avenue was reached; then south to one of the cross-streets which led to Broadway. Anderson reached a building devoted to business purposes, though at that late hour business seemed to be wholly suspended, and the outer door was closed; but he laid his hand confidently upon the knob, opened the door and went in. It closed behind him.

Jack hesitated. He had a profound respect for law, and would not willingly have done a dishonorable thing, but he was anxious to know what had called Anderson there. Dared he follow further?

"I may git inter a bad mess," he muttered, "but the idea is strong in my mind that I kin help unravel the mystery by follerin' Roland. I'll try it!"

Cautiously he opened the door. The hall was deserted and nearly dark. A light on the floor above served to break the gloom just enough to show that the way was clear. Jack ascended the stairs slowly. They led to a deserted corridor. Several doors, plainly those of offices, opened from it, but in only one case was there sign of life.

From under one door, and from the transom above it, a light shone faintly. Jack went to the door. A bright new sign was fastened to it, and he read as follows:

"THE ROYAL BONANZA MINING CO.,

"Gold Pocket, Idaho.

"STEPHEN HECKLEY, NEW YORK AGENT."

Near this was posted a written notice which stated that the "entrance" was "next door." Jack went to the next door. All was dark there, but another sign certified that it was the "visitors' room" of the mining company.

Jack meditated, remembered that the light

was in the other room, gained an idea, determined to investigate, did so, and found his theory confirmed. Carefully opening the door he found the room dark and still, while from the lighted room he could hear the murmur of voices.

He advanced to the connecting door.

He could hear quite plainly, and he listened eagerly. A heavy-voiced man was speaking:

"We are not gettin' on as fast as we ought ter. Thar is still a good 'eal o' stock ter be took."

"We can't expect to dispose of all in a few days," replied a familiar voice—clearly, Anderson's.

"No; nor we can't expect ter keep this up fur years."

"I think we are doing well, old man."

"No sale in a week."

"But you have as good as sold much more."

"They're nibblin'—nibblin' jest like fish; an' ef you ever did anything in that line, you know thar is nothin' more aggravatin' than a nibblin' fish. Let 'em bite, or keep away."

"When any man risks his cash, he is likely to nibble before he bites. Don't be impatient; the Royal Bonanza is booming."

The man with the heavy voice laughed a heavy laugh.

"It's the greatest thing on earth!" he asserted. "Located in ther finest part o' Idaho—a wide valley, all o' promise, an' all ours. Nuggets by the quart; golden grains by ther car-load. Prospectors say it's ther daddy of them all at present bein' worked. One hundred acres under our full control, an' ev'ry foot liable ter be pay-dirt. All we want is a leetle more money ter work it, an' New York influence, an' stock in good New York hands. Buy, but don't sell; stick ter yer grip, sir; you can't help doublin' your money, an' it may increase tenfold on yer hands. That's the way I give it to 'um!"

This time Anderson laughed, and Heckley joined in, his deep base ringing out heartily.

"No words of yours can over-portray the rich realities of the Royal Bonanza," added Anderson.

"Fact, sure as you live, young feller."

Jack had by this time become very curious to see the "New York agent" of the mining company, and he carefully opened the door a little. The desired view was gained.

Heckley sat by a desk—a big, rough, cross-looking man, with plain, rough, ill-fitting garments, and a most prodigious beard. It covered his lower face, his neck and a part of his breast, and had apparently not been trimmed in the last twenty years. A gray, wide-rimmed hat of true Western pattern lay near his elbow.

Jack had never been further west than New Jersey, but, in his opinion, Heckley looked like a typical Western miner. Rough as he was, he did not look like a villain, either. He seemed to be bluff, frank and honest, and if Jack had seen him in other company, he would never have had unfavorable ideas concerning him.

Such thoughts were in Jack's mind when the corridor door suddenly opened. The boy looked around quickly. Another man had appeared, and the spy was caught between two fires.

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTIVE JACK.

HARLEM JACK experienced a momentary feeling of alarm. The bold entrance of the unknown at that hour indicated that he was no stranger there, and, in all probability, he was a friend of the men in the other room. Standing where he did he cut off Jack's chance of escape, and discovery seemed almost certain.

One moment of dismay, and then the boy's mind cleared. He was not one to be overwhelmed by ordinary troubles, and he saw the one chance open to him.

Quickly but carefully he retreated to a corner of the room.

The unknown rapped sharply on the wall with his cane.

"Hullo! hullo!" he called. "Anybody here?" There was a stir in the further room, and Heckley appeared at the door.

"Who's thar?" he asked.

"It's me. Is Roland Anderson here?"

"He is that—"

Anderson appeared at the door.

"Oh! is it you, Sam?"

"Yes; I thought I'd find you here. Are you busy? I want to talk with you. Suppose we go in somewhere and have a stew while we talk? I'd like to have you and your friend along—the invitation is for both. What do you say?"

"It will suit me well. What of you, Heckley? This is Sam Underwood—you remember him."

"Right wal, pard. Glad ter see ye, young feller. Go out? I don't keer ef I do; I'm all ready as soon as I git my hat. Wait a second!"

He hustled into the other room, secured his hat, turned off the gas and was ready to go. Jack, crouching unobserved in the corner began to breathe freer. There was now no light except that in the corridor, and discovery did not seem likely to follow. When they were gone, he could go too—at least, so he thought.

They passed out of the room; the door was closed behind them. Then Jack suddenly sprang to his feet. A well-known rattling had followed the closing of the door; a key had been introduced to the lock. *Click!* The bolt shot forward, and the investigating young man from Harlem was locked into the room.

He stood in dismay while their steps sounded more and more faintly, and then ceased to be heard.

"Locked in, by J. Caesar!" Jack exclaimed. "Caught in a trap, an' I set it myself. I say, this is a mighty bad go!"

He tried the door; as he had expected, it was securely locked. He entered the inner room and found the other corridor door in like condition. Then he boldly lit the gas, hoping to find still another door. There was none, and the only windows opened into the back yard.

Sitting down in Heckley's chair, the boy stretched out his legs, plunged his hands into his pockets and looked at the blank wall with an expression half-mournful, half-humorous.

"I approve o' bein' jolly!" he announced, "but I'll be bugged by a b'ar ef I see how it's goin' ter be did now. The hooman mind is so peccoliarly constitooted that it can't stand only about so much pressure 'thout bustin'. I think thar is danger of a bust now. I'd give my week's wages ef I was in G. W. Grimm's palatial edifice, an' consol'n' him fur his chronic hydrophoby—I would, sure as ever you live! Locked in! Great Scott! I think I see a dim, mournful vision o' a chap about my size bein' hauled off ter the station-house ter-morrer, with an onfeelin' mob follerin' at my back."

The thought banished all his humorous tendencies. The disgrace of such a thing would be more than he could bear, and his good old mother would be broken-hearted.

Jack leaped to his feet.

"She sha'n't have any cause ter blush fur me, ef I hev ter tunnel under all New York. I ain't had no unlawful ideas, an' I won't be disgraced; I'll escape somehow. Never say die."

Bravely resolved, but he was not yet out of the dilemma—nor out of the room.

He raised one of the windows. A long row of back yards lay before him, and the ground was not so far below that a leap would alarm him, but he must be sure that he would make a gain before he went down. Suppose he reached the yard, could he then escape? It would be easy to pass from one yard to another, but what were his chances of getting to the street?

Slowly and carefully he looked all around the inclosed "square." Not a break could he see. On four sides stood the connecting buildings. No house in process of erection, no alley, nothing whatever, as far as he could see, vouchsafed chance of escape.

If he descended to the ground he would only become a prisoner on a larger scale, and those who lived near would not willingly let him pass through their houses to the street. Possibly he could go through secretly, by means of a basement hall, but that meant another secret entrance, and he had had quite enough of it.

He next thought of the transom, but it was made of a size to correspond with the proportions of the low, old-fashioned house, and, small as Jack was, he found it impossible to pass through.

Next he experimented on the lock of the door, but only to fail.

Another discovery followed. There was in the inner, or private room, an article of furniture which Jack did not at first understand, but when he investigated, he found it to be a folding-bed. This gave him an idea, and he investigated further. The final result convinced him that some one slept in the room. Who was it, if not Heckley?

Jack became encouraged.

He promptly turned off the gas, and then secreted himself in the outer room. All his hopes were now bent upon the possibility that some one would come in and use the office as a sleeping-room. If this was done the key must come, too, and a chance would be given the young adventurer to escape.

With a much lighter heart he crouched in his hiding-place and awaited the result of his new plan.

Two hours passed.

Jack, beset with alternate hope and fear, had grown weary of waiting, but he would not venture upon any indiscretion. He kept his place, and waited with all the patience he could summon.

He felt sure that it must be near midnight when he heard a stir outside the room. Then followed the clang of a door—beyond doubt, that at the foot of the stairs had been closed. This suggested two questions. Would it be locked? If so, would the key be left in the lock?

No doubt, yes would be the proper reply to both questions.

Heavy steps ascended the stairs and approached the door. It was unlocked with a steady hand; some one entered; a "click" announced that it had again been fastened; and then some one lumbered into the private room. The door was not immediately closed, and when the newcomer lit the gas, Jack plainly saw Heckley.

He yawned and tossed his hat carelessly away.

"Late hours!" he muttered. "This don't agree with me. Lord bless ye, I'd rather be in ther West, wieldin' ther pick, an' smokin' my pipe among the wild gulches, an' goin' ter bed at eight or nine o'clock, than havin' ther run o' all New York. Durn New York! It's Dead Sea fruit—all rotten at ther core. Give me ther mountains o' ther West, an' no city life in mine."

He kicked off the heavy boots he wore, and then proceeded to "let down" the folding-bed.

"Another great idee!" he growled. "When I's a boy a bed *was* a bed; now they double up like a jack-knife, an' in course o' time, I s'pose folks'll carry them in their vest-pockets. They may, but give me a blanket in a gulch; that's bed enough fur me!"

Muttering thus, he proceeded to undress, and was soon between the sheets of the insulted bed. And Happy Jack? He was still in the outer room.

There was a "hitch" in the progress of affairs, and it all arose from the fact that when Heckley locked the corridor door he had removed the key. Jack had seen this plainly while the gaslight fell upon the door, though he did not know what had become of the key, Heckley having entered in the dark.

The way of escape was still blocked.

If the Western man had also locked the door which connected the two rooms, Jack's last chance would have vanished. The door had not been locked; free access to the other room was open—and the key was there. But where? In all probability, in Heckley's pocket.

"Thar is jest one thing about it," thought Jack; "I've got ter wait until he's asleep, an' then creep in an' get the key. That's the only way, an', unless he's a mighty light sleeper, I guess I'll get out yit. Never say die! I'll be as jolly as I kin."

It was a dismal attempt, but he did his best.

Half an hour passed, and then the prospect brightened—Heckley began to snore loudly.

"Keep it up, my hearty!" muttered Jack. "I've always thought it the most hideous sound out, but *your* snore is full o' sweet music, by gracious!"

A few minutes more he waited, and then the venture began. He knew right where Heckley had put his clothes; he had only to crawl to the spot and search the pockets.

He started.

Not an unnatural sound betrayed him; he struck against no furniture, and no boards creaked under his feet; yet it seemed to him that the rustling of his clothes was dangerously loud.

He reached the connecting door, and with the utmost caution turned the knob and pushed the door back. All well, thus far. He entered the room. It was a new and painful situation, and he wished himself well out of it. There was only one way to get out, and that was to persevere.

Slowly, very slowly, he crept forward. The snore was no longer musical to his ears; it was the threatening voice of a demon waiting to seize him. What if Heckley should awake?

The boy's hands touched the cast-off garments. He selected the trowsers, and ran his hand quickly into a pocket. Empty! He tried a second. It contained a huge piece of tobacco, and an equally large knife—but no key. Was he doomed to disappointment?

He turned to the coat. One pocket—empty! A second pocket—no sign of the key. (How loudly the man snored!) Two pockets left—and both proved to be empty.

For a moment Jack was dismayed, but he rallied. The vest remained. He searched it;

the key was not there. With a sinking heart he paused, and then a new idea occurred to him; he had not looked in the "hip-pocket" of the trowsers.

He turned to it; he thrust in his hand with nervous haste; at last—at last his fingers closed upon the coveted key.

Just then Heckley started up in bed.

"Who in thunder is thar?" he cried.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOMEBODY GETS HURT.

THE interruption came with startling force to Harlem Jack. He shrunk back, held his breath and waited with painful anxiety.

"I say, who's thar?" demanded Heckley.

Still no reply.

"You can't deceive me," persisted the Western man. "I've got ears trained by many a wild scene. Speak out!"

Jack did not speak out, nor did he stir.

"Odd!" muttered Heckley. "I could almost have sworn that somebody was hyar—an' yit, I may hev dreamed it. I've dreamed in ther mountains o' bein' skulped by Injuns, afore now, but my ha'r is still on my head. We imagine things that ain't so, an' git inter a heap o' trouble over nothin'. Hold hard, old man! I never imagined this; somethin' was stirrin' in this room. I say, pard, we'll hev it out; I'm an old miner, an' I've got a six-shooter in my hand. Ef you try ter do me up, it's a lead pill fur you. I'll git up an' see ye, an' ef we kin hit it right, maybe I won't fill ye up with lead."

He bounded out of bed.

Thus far Jack had waited in the vain hope that the man would quiet down and let the matter pass as a dream, but the last hope now vanished. Heckley would light the gas, and then all would be lost.

The intruder started for the door with more speed than caution.

Heckley uttered a roar and sprang after him; his hand closed around Jack's arm and arrested his progress.

"Hold up!" cried the miner. "I've got ther drop—my revolver is at yer head!"

Something hard and cold touched Jack's temple.

The danger gave him the courage of desperation; he flung up his clinched hand. It was chance, but the blow fell just right and the revolver went flying from Heckley's hand.

"One fur you!" admitted the cool Westerner; "but I've got ye still. Try my muskles, ef ye wish. Dance on my toes, ef ye car' to; I'm a war-eagle from 'way back."

He was holding fast to Jack, while his prisoner was in a panic. What could he do to save himself? He had been pulling with all his strength, but it availed him nothing. He determined to try a different course, and with the force of despair he flung his whole weight against Heckley. This course was just what the miner did not expect; he staggered back; his legs struck the bed, and then he went over upon it with a crash.

His hold upon Jack was broken.

The latter fled toward the door.

He heard Heckley behind him, but this only hastened his own movements. He had instinctively clung to the key, and it was in his hand. If only he could gain time to insert it in the door and turn back the bolt!

The chances were against him, but capricious fate often plays tricks which place the weakest of persons upon a level with the strong. The door which connected the two rooms had been left ajar, not wholly open. Both ran toward it in the dark. Jack passed out safely, but fate ordained that Heckley should run full against the door. He did so, and was flung down, flat upon his back, with a force which made the building shake.

At the same time Jack reached the corridor door. Excitedly he sought in the dark for the keyhole. Chance, still in his favor, aided him, and he flung back the bolt, tore open the door and dashed out.

Across the hall he sped, and down the stairs. The outer door—was it locked? He tried it. It was locked, but the key was in place. A moment more and he was on the sidewalk, with the stars above his head and miles of pavement ready for his eager feet.

He did not hear Heckley in pursuit, but he was not anxious to wait for him. He started away on a run.

At the same moment the miner was sitting upon the floor of his room, feeling of a bruised head.

"Hit hard!" he philosophically muttered. "That fellow was no slouch. I've never seen a reg'lar, first-class pugilist, but I reckon I've felt

one ter-night. What a fist! Lord bless us, he'd knock down a beef-critter an' never turn a hair. He's a dandy! Reminds me o' ther time I was kicked by a mule at Leadville, only ther mule laid back his ears afore he kicked. Ef I'd b'en wise ther mule would hev seen only vacancy ter kick at. But my pugilist never laid back an ear—I sw'ar he didn't. I couldn't see, but my hearin' is good, an' I could 'a' heard 'em flop. No warnin', an' he hit me like a pile-driver!"

Mr. Heckley shook his head with grave reproof. He caressed that head, too, gingerly—he had a vague idea that it might be broken open—and then added:

"See hyar, no human fist did that. Either I was struck by lightnin', or the world has come to an end. The air seems heavy; I may be buried alive by a landslide. Or a tidal wave may hev drowned out all New York. I'll git a glim an' see!"

Laboriously he gained his feet, struck a match and lit the gas. He was no fool, and at the expiration of a few seconds he had arrived at a correct explanation of how he was knocked down.

In the meanwhile Jack had gone on rapidly, only abating his speed when he remembered that it would not do to let a patrolman see him running. He moderated his pace and walked to the Fourteenth street station of the Third Avenue Elevated Road.

In due time he reached home.

That night he did not fall asleep as quickly as usual, for his thoughts dwelt persistently upon his late adventure. He had had an experience which he was not likely to forget right away, and felt sure that if Heckley had caught him, it would have gone hard with him. Whether the miner was a rascal or not, he was a rough man who would deal with an enemy in New York very much as he would in the Western gold-diggings.

Jack could not see that he had gained much by his visit to the Royal Bonanza Office. True, the conversation between Heckley and Anderson indicated that the whole thing was a fraud, but it had been conducted in such a peculiar way that even he was not sure, and he could prove nothing to others.

Despite this, there was no doubt in his mind that the Royal Bonanza was a mere swindle, and that Heckley, Anderson, Dickerman and, perhaps, others, were working the stock off upon the unsuspecting public, with Edward Cordova as the chief victim.

How could he prove all this? How could he save Cordova from the trap laid to ruin him?

The boy did not believe that any such place as Gold Pocket existed in Idaho, or, if it did, that Heckley had any mine there. But how prove all this? It is not so easy to prove that a certain place, or thing, does not exist in a Western Territory as it would be in an Eastern State.

He went to sleep without any clear idea; he arose the next morning in the same mood.

Although there was a remote possibility that he might in some way have betrayed himself to Anderson, he went to Cordova's office at the usual hour. He was kindly greeted by Edward, while Pedro smiled broadly and, watching his chance, slyly showed a book which he carried under his coat. Clearly, he was still determined to learn the English language, and, perhaps, he hoped to become inoculated with it by carrying the book.

Cordova had only just come in. Business was dull, and he handed Harvey Stannard one of his two daily papers. The young Brazilian had a habit of looking for the hotel arrivals first of all; he was not yet a thorough New Yorker, and if he saw that any one from Brazil was at a hotel, he usually went to call on him.

He went through his paper in vain this time. "Here is a list of hotel arrivals, sir," said Harvey.

"Ah! Any Brazilians?"

"No, sir."

"Strange how few come here."

"Yesterday did not seem to be a good day for noted men. Here's a well-known Congressman at the Fifth Avenue, but this Judge Lockstrong I don't know. The Governor of Idaho is at the Hoffman, and Colonel Trenchard, of Kentucky, at the Astor House. No celebrities."

"I should really like to meet some old friend from Brazil," said Cordova, frowning a little.

He was not in the best of spirits. Sanguine as his American cousin appeared to be, Cordova was not at ease as to his financial investments. He was rich, and was not inclined to worship money, but it was dawning upon him that, yielding to Dickerman's persuasions, and the glittering promise of success, he had put out a large amount of money, and that he was as

ignorant of the business he was engaged in, with its dangers and chances, as a child.

He had become a trifle anxious; hence, his unusually strong desire to meet some old friend and have a long, pleasant conversation.

Happy Jack approached him.

"I say, sir!"

"Well, Jack?"

"Did the paper say the Governor o' Idaho was at a hotel?"

"I think so."

"Wouldn't this be a good chance fur you ter find out how the Royal Bonanza Mine is looked at, at home?"

Cordova suddenly straightened in his chair, while Harvey looked deeply shocked. He would not have thought of making such a suggestion to an employer, and in this case it seemed to suggest a doubt of Neil Dickerman. The latter had investigated the Royal Bonanza Mine, and found it sound, and that was enough. Dickerman was a shrewd business man and a gentleman—so Harvey thought.

But Cordova seemed quite taken with the suggestion.

"By St. Catherine! there is something in that!" he exclaimed.

"Bein' he holds the office he does, he ought ter know ef the Bonanza is safe ter invest in," continued Jack.

"He is the chief officer of the Territory, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Cordova," put in Harvey, "I hope you will excuse Jack, for he is young—"

"Excuse him for what, Mr. Stannard?"

"His peculiar—that is—his interference."

"Bless you, sir," the Brazilian answered, "I owe him thanks, instead of reproof. My boy, you have a good head on your shoulders, and it bids fair to put you in some position of influence sooner or later. Now, it never occurred to me that the Governor of Idaho was just the man I ought to see."

"Ef the Bonanza is a swindle, he kin tell ye, I guess."

Harvey held up both hands in horror, but Cordova briskly arose. What followed was in Spanish, but is here translated.

"Pedro!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Get my hat. I am going to the Hoffman House, and you may accompany me."

CHAPTER IX.

JACK STIRS UP TROUBLE.

THE last few words were not intelligible to Jack and Harvey, but Cordova turned to them and repeated, in English, that he was going to the hotel. Then he went out, accompanied by Pedro. A frown was on Harvey's face, and he looked severely at his companion.

"Jack!"

"Yes?"

"Do you know what you've done?"

"Ain't done much o' anything yet."

"Who is running this business, Cordova or you?"

"He's running it, an' I'm helpin' him," coolly replied the Harlem boy.

"I should say you were trying to do it all."

"Now, see here, Harv, what's wigglin' in your mind?"

"Just this: I am not an old head at business, but I guess that a secretary and an office boy ain't hired to manage the business of their boss. This is on general principles, as I may say. Now, as to this present case, Cordova's money, not ours, is in the Royal Bonanza Mine. More than that, he put it in under good advice. Neil Dickerman is a New Yorker and a gentleman. He's up in the ways of the world, and has speculated a good deal. He's looked into the Royal Bonanza and found it sound. Now, I'd like to know what call you and I have to interfere? You spoke of the mine as though it might be a swindle. I am shocked, Jack—shocked!"

Harvey spoke in a tone of irritation, but Jack was not disturbed in the least degree.

"You ought ter be a lawyer, Harv. You hev a good 'eal of eloquence, an' could carry any jury with ye—ef you could only make 'em see as you see."

"Don't be sarcastic; I only speak for your good."

"You think the Bonanza is sound, eh?"

"I know it is."

"How d'ye know?"

"Mr. Dickerman says so."

"Do you b'lieve all he says?"

"Why not?"

"My question come fu'st."

"If you mean to cast doubt upon Mr. Dickerman it is not only very unjust, but may cost you your place. He is an honorable gentleman—"

"I remember it was him got ye the job."

"What do you mean?"

"Only fur him you wouldn't had this place, an' it's nat'ral you should stick by him. All right; you've a right ter your opinion, an' I hev ter mine. We won't quarrel, Harvey, an' all I ask o' you is that you won't tell on me."

"You have told on yourself, by speaking as you did to Mr. Cordova. However, I bear you no ill; I am only sorry to see you make such a mistake; and I shall not do anything to hurt you. That's all!"

Stannard turned somewhat irritably to his work, while Happy Jack looked at the gas-fixture and winked solemnly.

"All right," he replied. "Never say die! We'll be happy, somehow."

But to the gas-fixture he addressed, in imagination, these words:

"We'll see who's right. Harvey is ag'in' me, an' G. W. Grimm says I'm too ready ter see a nigger in the wood-pile, but I stick ter my opinion. Harvey never'll see a scheme where there ain't no scheme, fur he was brought up where folks was honest. We'll see!"

Half an hour later the office-door opened and Neil Dickerman and Stephen Heckley entered. Harlem Jack was a little startled. Had the Western man discovered who his night visitor was, and come to make trouble for Jack? The latter noticed an abrasion of the skin on Heckley's forehead, but that person did not favor him with more than a casual glance.

"Good morning, Mr. Stannard," said Neil, very politely. "Where is Cordova?"

"Gone out for a few moments, Mr. Dickerman. He will come back soon."

"Very well; we'll wait. Sit down, my dear Mr. Heckley. How's the Royal Bonanza stock going?"

"Right wal, pard," the New York agent replied. "I sold ten thousand dollars' worth o' stock yesterday."

Harvey cast a reproachful glance at Jack. He did not know that at a late hour the previous night, Jack had heard Heckley tell Anderson that he had not made a sale for a week!

Jack remembered this, and knew that he had caught Heckley in a lie. Here was one item of proof.

"I hope you are getting good men?" proceeded Neil.

"I be. I could sell out all ther stock in no time, but we are bound ter hev only A1 men inter it, an' I take keer that they are honor'ble, high-toned gents afore I sell."

"Bait fur Harvey an' me!" thought Jack, contemptuously, but he held his peace and kept a composed face.

In a short time Edward Cordova returned. Jack's gaze flashed to him at once; he studied the Brazilian's face keenly. What had been the result of his visit to the Governor of Idaho? Cordova's expression was grave, and he frowned slightly as he saw who was present, but he came forward calmly. Heckley was making ready to arise and give his usual grizzly-bear-like hand-shake, but Cordova, whether intentionally or not, evaded it.

He sat down quietly.

The man from the Wild West and Mr. Dickerman were in high spirits; they took the lead in conversation, and for several minutes everything went briskly. Then it suddenly dawned upon Dickerman that Cordova was very silent and grave.

"Aren't you well, Edward?" he asked.

"No," was the brief reply.

"What is the trouble?"

"I hardly know, but I'm not in an active mood."

"I've felt that thar way myself," affirmed Heckley. "B'en obliged ter lay down my pick when I's baulin' out nuggets by ther bushel. It's all along o' a man's liver, my dear sir. Ther symptoms are dullness, headache, slight fever, no appetite. I've b'en so myself, an' b'en so miser'ble I've wished ther mountain peaks would tumble down on me. Fack, oy thunder! But a bit o' medicine will make ye all right. Wal, gents, I'm off, fur I s'pect ter sell some stock ter a Murray Hill gent, an' business is business. I'll see ye later. So-long, pards!"

He waved his hand with bluff good humor and went out.

Dickerman had been studying Cordova's face closely.

"You do look out of condition, Edward," he said. "Perhaps you had better see a doctor—"

"Thank you, no," coldly answered the Brazilian. "Instead, let us talk business."

"Have you opened your morning letters?"

"No; I will do so directly. I see my railroad stock is doing well just now."

"A very favorable rise, indeed."

"Yes. How about the Royal Bonanza?"

Evidently he tried to speak carelessly, but the effort was a failure, and Dickerman knew there was something back.

"The stock is nearly all sold," he guardedly answered.

"To good parties?"

"Yes."

"Do they believe in it fully?"

"Why, certainly. All speculators are crazy after it, for they think there is a fortune in it."

Cordova had passed a cigar to his cousin. He now lit one himself, again making a failure of an attempt to act at ease.

"Neil," he observed, "they say a fever to make money is pernicious. If you desire, I will sell you my Royal Bonanza stock at just what it cost me."

Dickerman looked a little startled.

"I'd take it if I had the money, my dear fellow, most assuredly, but I haven't. But why in the world do you wish to sell?"

"Because," steadily replied the Brazilian, showing new firmness, "I doubt if there is such a thing in existence as the Royal Bonanza Gold Mine!"

The words were spoken. Jack waited with intense interest; Pedro, unable to understand a sentence, watched the two men's faces with painful eagerness; and Harvey suspended work and looked very much shocked.

And Dickerman? He was alarmed. He stared at the Brazilian in blank dismay, and no words passed his lips. Cordova was looking at him sharply, but it was not a suspicious gaze. Whatever he thought of the affair, he had not arrived at the point of suspecting his cousin of deliberately trying to ruin him.

"Bless my soul!" Neil finally ejaculated. "What in the world do you mean?"

"It is said that the Royal Bonanza is situated in the town of Gold Pocket, in the Rolling-Pin Valley, Idaho. Well, I am informed that there is no such valley, and no such town, and that nobody knows of such a mine—except on paper."

"Who says so?" demanded Neil, his face strangely flushed.

"The Governor of Idaho."

"Have you been to Idaho?"

"No. The governor is here—at the Hoffman House. I have consulted him, and he says he never heard of the mine. As for Gold Pocket and Rolling-Pin Valley, he is sure there are no such places in Idaho."

"But—"

"Furthermore, he gives the opinion that the whole thing is a swindle."

"Why, I have investigated—"

Dickerman paused abruptly.

"Yes," Cordova coolly continued, "you have investigated, and you assured me that the whole thing was genuine and safe. How came you to make such a blunder?"

There was sternness in his manner now, and it was plain that the delicate, pleasant gentleman had resolution enough when once it was aroused. Dark-faced Pedro thrust his head forward and watched with an expression which was almost startling. What would not the man have given then to understand English! He knew some trouble was under way, but not a sentence could he comprehend.

"By heavens! it doesn't seem possible!" declared Neil, smiting his knee. "I never saw a more promising thing on the surface, and I believe there is a terrible blunder. This governor—is he an intelligent man? Is he—"

"Very intelligent."

"But how is he to know what new mines are just started in Idaho?"

"But he says there is no town named Gold Pocket, and no valley—"

"They are all new names; Heckley said so."

"Well, as your faith is so strong, I'll sell you my stock at a discount of—"

"But I've said I haven't the ready money."

"So be it, but one thing must be done. Heckley has got a good-sized block of my money, and I propose to know whether he represents a substantial mine or an imaginary one."

"Right, quite right, Edward. I'll go with you to Heckley's office, and we will look into this matter thoroughly."

CHAPTER X.

THE BLUE BOTTLE.

"YOUR letters, sir!"

Happy Jack had been uneasy at this delay, and anxious to get a word to Edward Cordova without Dickerman's knowledge. He sought for a way—and found it. Three unopened letters lay upon the desk. He had picked them up

with a capital pretense of carelessness, and, getting out of the range of Neil's observation, had written a few words upon one envelope. If the Brazilian only used prudence, his plan bade fair to succeed.

He advanced and presented the letters to his employer.

Cordova looked at him in momentary irritation, and was about to direct him to lay the letters down, when he remembered that it was this boy who had given him his first real warning. The recollection appealed to his kindness.

He took the letters.

Glancing carelessly at the superscription of the first he saw other writing beside it, and read these words:

"Better call on the police. If I's you, I'd have Heckley watched every minute. He may skip. Keep mum!"

Cordova was surprised, and not a little startled. Here was a plain, sensible warning. Despite the last two words he was about to speak—still unsuspicious that Neil had been worse than careless—when it occurred to him that this warning must have been intentionally made secret.

Plainly, Jack wished to hide it from some one.

Once more he remembered that the office-boy had shown good sense in the past; would it not be a good idea to give his latest plan a fair chance? Trying to appear at his ease, he looked at the other letters and then put all three in his pocket.

His attempt at acting had not succeeded. Dickerman knew there was something unusual afoot, and he bent a glance upon Jack which was both searching and threatening. He read nothing there; the boy's face was the very picture of calm innocence.

"Are you ready to go to Heckley's office?" Cordova asked.

"Yes."

Dickerman arose promptly.

"Then we will be off."

Cordova took his hat, and then turned to Stannard.

"How is your work?"

"I am just finishing what is on hand, sir."

"When through, you and Jack can go; you are both at liberty, except that I desire you to report at four o'clock. There may be some more business by that time."

Turning to Pedro, he added a few words in Spanish, and then went out with Dickerman. Stannard gave Jack one angry look, and then resumed his writing. He completed it inside of five minutes, and then he and Jack were ready to go. They left the house, and again Harvey bent an angry gaze upon his companion.

"Well, you've done it, haven't you?"

"Done what?"

"Stirred up a pretty row. By gracious! I am ashamed of you. Is it for this I got you the place? The place! You won't keep it a week!"

"Soft an' easy, my wise friend!" coolly replied the Harlem boy. "I ain't lost my place yet, an' ef I do, I won't blame you."

"That ain't it—you have disgraced me."

"How?"

"I recommended you for the place, and now you reward me by stirring up a trouble which points the finger of suspicion directly to Mr. Neil. Dickerman—as honest, upright, noble gentleman as New York can boast of."

"Then I pity New York."

"Jack, you aggravate me terribly."

"Sorry!"

"I can't see why you have acted so. Neil is Cordova's own cousin, which is proof enough that he is anxious to look out for his interests, and as for deceiving him—why, no rascal can take him in. Is it strange that the Governor of Idaho don't know about the mine? It would be strange if he did. How can he know all the mines in his Territory? Or the towns, when new towns are springing up every day?"

"S'pose we drop the subject, Harvey. We don't want ter quarrel; drop it, an' wait. Let's be jolly! You an' me ain't got money up, anyhow, an' we needn't worry. Never say die!"

It was somewhat later when Cordova and Dickerman returned. They had been to Stephen Heckley's office—the result may be stated in few words. He had received them with bluff cordiality, and announced that he could prove the solidity of the Royal Bonanza. And then he brought out a large package of letters, all signed by men—so he said—who could certify that the mine was all right. The letters did so certify, and there were the names signed to them. Two or three Cordova remembered having seen in the newspapers, and Dickerman claimed that he knew nearly all by reputation.

There were a banker, a lawyer and a minister of Denver; a judge, of Leadville; a bank president and three lawyers, of St. Louis; and various parties who lived in Boise City, Idaho City, Paris, Placerville, Challis and other places of Idaho.

And when he had shown them, bluff Mr. Heckley leaned back in his chair and asked if he had not proved the Royal Bonanza "solid."

Dickerman shook his hand and said that he had, and Cordova—gave up the battle. The proof seemed complete, and he had no more to say.

The cousins went homeward together, but the Brazilian was not himself. What proof had he that one of these letters was genuine? Might they not be forged? Mixed with thoughts of this kind was the recollection of Jack's advice that he report to the police authorities and have Heckley "shadowed." He was not yet ready to do this; he determined to take a little time for meditation, and then decide whether to test the genuineness of the letters.

Dickerman left him at the house.

The American cousin walked away with a thoughtful frown upon his face. When he had gone two blocks he hired a cab and drove to Roland Anderson's quarters.

Some business kept him with that young man an hour and a half. They came out together, looking unusually grave, and parted at the door. Neil went toward home; Anderson went in the opposite direction. He made a long journey, walking in a very roundabout course, but finally paused before a certain house, rung the bell and was admitted. The house was somewhat of a novelty and a mystery to those who lived near.

It was the residence of Otis Harbison, the chemist.

Happy Jack did not forget that Cordova had asked him to call at the house at four o'clock. He kept the appointment. Harvey Stannard had already been there, and, there being no business, had gone away. Cordova was in the parlor, instead of the office, and to that room the boy was sent.

The young Brazilian was seated in an easy-chair, with Pedro only a few steps away. At first glance Jack noticed a change in Cordova's appearance. His cheeks were flushed, one hand was pressed upon his forehead, as though there was a pain there, and his general expression indicated fatigue if not illness.

"I have an errand for you, my boy," Cordova abruptly said. "Take the slip of paper you see on the table, go to the nearest drug-store, and have the order filled."

"Be you sick, sir?" asked straightforward Jack.

"A little. Don't waste any time."

The Brazilian's manner was more peremptory than Jack had ever seen it before. He decided that it was a time when he would be wise not to make unnecessary talk. He took the paper and a sum of money and went out.

"Pedro," said Cordova in Spanish, "bring me my overcoat from the hall."

The servant went out with his usual quick, quiet steps, and returned with a coat in his hand. He passed it to his master, who thrust his hand into the inside breast pocket. A look of surprise passed over his face, and he drew out—a small bottle.

He gazed at it in wonder. He had never seen it before. It was in some ways a peculiar bottle. In size it was but little more than a vial, yet the glass was thick and heavy. Moreover, the color of the glass was blue, and such a peculiar, bright blue that it held Cordova's attention fixed. Bright, brilliant and sparkling was the bottle, as though infinitesimal diamonds were flashing there.

The bottle held his attention, as has been said, and it did the same to Pedro. Both gazed wonderingly, admiringly at the remarkable object for several moments. Then Cordova turned his gaze upon the coat.

"What have you there? That is not my coat."

"Pardon me, senor; you are right," Pedro replied; "but it is the only coat in the hall."

"That is remarkable—Wait! I think Dickerman must have accidentally changed with me."

"No doubt, senor."

The Brazilian looked back at the bottle and raised one hand to the cork. Then he suddenly lowered it again.

"It is Neil's property, not mine. Put the coat back to where you found it."

He slipped the bottle into the pocket and Pedro returned the coat to its place. He had

just re-entered the parlor when the door-bell rung, and in a moment more Neil was again in the room. Cordova had again raised his hand to his forehead with a weary gesture, and this prevented him from seeing that his esteemed cousin looked excited.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "Have you seen a robber here?"

"No," Cordova replied.

"Look at him now. By some mischance I took the wrong coat when I went away—took yours and left mine. I've come to swap back. Had you noticed the change?"

"Yes. I wanted something from my coat, but we found it gone. I suspected the truth, and there is no harm done."

He rubbed his hand across his forehead heavily. Neil opened his lips to speak, but closed them without a word.

"I'll rectify the mistake."

"Pedro will bring your own—"

"No, no; never mind. I'll get it."

Dickerman hurried into the hall. The first thing he did when he reached his own coat was to run his hand into the inside breast-pocket. His fingers closed upon the blue bottle, and a look of relief passed over his face. He took off one coat and put on the other, and then moved toward the front of the hall. A thoughtful look was on his face, and when he reached the parlor he paused at the door. Once more he seemed on the point of saying something important, or asking a question, but instead, he hesitated, and then made an insipid remark about the weather.

This done, he left the house.

His face bore an expression curiously made up of relief and anxiety—strange combination!—and as he went away he pressed his hand against his coat over the blue bottle.

CHAPTER XI. DETECTIVE WORK.

JACK returned just too late to see Dickerman at all, and as no explanations were made to him he did not hear about the blue bottle or the accidental exchange of coats. He completed the errand which had been given him to do, and then left the house.

"Mr. Cordova has been all shook up by what's happened," he thought. "He looks bad. Of course I couldn't question him while he was that way, but I do wish I knowed jest how he made out at Heckley's, an' whether he's been ter the perlice. Hullo! p'r'aps Harvey knows. I'll call on him, though he'll no doubt give me another blowin' up."

He called upon the secretary, who justified his expectations, and gave him the "blowin' up" in due order. Stannard still disapproved of Jack's course, and told him so plainly.

The visit was not a failure, however. Stannard knew the result of the Brazilian's investigations; at least, he told Jack that Cordova had been shown documentary evidence that proved beyond question that the Royal Bonanza was sound. When asked if their employer had been to the police, Stannard answered in a tone of horror that he had not—

"Certainly not!"

Jack had heard enough. Good-humoredly refusing to quarrel with Harvey, he left him and made another call. This time it was upon G. W. Grimm. He wanted an ally, and had determined to enlist the eccentric shanty-dweller. True, Grimm was against him in his theories, and might refuse to be convinced; but if he refused, he would have one virtue left—there was no danger that he would betray any confidence reposed in him.

He found Grimm alone, and as jolly as ever. "Drop down som'ers," he genially said, "P'r'aps you'd better keep nigh the door, fur I may hev a malignant attack o' hydrophoby, an' you'd want ter run. Bow-wow-wow! Tell ye what, Jack, it's a sorerful thing ter be in my way. Bit by a mad-dog, I've had chronic hydrophoby—bow-wow!—goin' on thirty year, an' it tries my personal system mortally. Offer me water an' I'd howl like p'ison, but whisky generally quiets me. Odd, ain't it! Bow-wow!"

Jack let his friend have his say, and then came to business.

In as few words as possible he told his reasons for believing that Cordova was in the hands of sharpers, giving a full account of his adventures at Heckley's rooms.

The latter part shocked Grimm, who held up his hands in shocked surprise when he heard of the boy's narrow escape, but to the rest he gave close and serious attention. The fact that the Governor of Idaho knew nothing about the mine impressed him as being significant. Not being well informed in geography he was not

aware that Idaho was nearly eighty-five thousand square miles in area, and that it was constantly undergoing changes; but he did have a great respect for governors, and he took it for granted that if there was a Royal Bonanza Mine, the chief magistrate of the Territory must be aware of the fact.

Reasoning from this point of view, he at last thought as Jack did.

"Suspicious, very!" he declared, when the story was told.

"I think so."

"Good many knaves in New York, blessed city though it is."

"You are right."

"We've dropped on some on 'em."

"Pity Cordova didn't see ther perlice."

"Right you be, lad."

"Heckley ought ter be shadderred."

"True as ye live."

"He's got Cordova's money, an' now he's got warnin' that Cordova is s'pishous. What'll Heckley do? Why, he'll skip."

"Too bad, by sixty!"

"There is one way ter prevent it."

"How?"

"Fur you an' me ter take the job."

"Us?"

"That's what I said."

"What kin we do?"

"What I tol' Cordova ter hev the perlice do—'shadder' Heckley. Thar is a possibility that they think the Brazilian is so talked over that he won't say nothin', an' that danger is blowed over, but I'm afeerd it's t'other way, Heckley is grumblin' 'cause business is so poor, an' with a chance o' gittin' pulled inter court, what'll he be likely ter do? I'll tell ye in one word—skip! That's why I say you an' me ought ter shadder him, takin' turns, an' makin' sure he don't leave the city."

"S'pose he tries ter leave?"

"Then whichever on us is watchin' will hev him arrested right away."

"By Jinks! you've got a head on ye, my boy. an' I begin ter feel a glow in my blood I ain't had sence I raised my fu'st mustache. I ain't sure but I was born fur a detective. an' ef I go inter it I may git up a reputation ekul ter Inspector Byrnes, or some o' them other notable characters. It would look right wal ter see the name o' G. W. Grimm, detective, in all the papers, an' hailed by his admirin' feller-citizens as the peer o' the great French detective—a—what was his name? Lemme see! Graylock?"

"Vidocq, d'ye mean?"

"Jes' so. Bow-wow! But see hyar: Could we hev him arrested ef he tried ter leave the city? Is the proof so strong that a perliceman would take him in, ef we said so?"

Jack's face lengthened somewhat.

"Do ye think it ain't?" he anxiously asked.

"That's whar you hev me. Is it, or ain't it? I never studied law, though I'm poety wal posted on medicine, owin' ter my battle with chronic hydrophoby. Bow-wow! I've always thought I'd let the law be, ef the law would let me be. But now I feel a fever ter be a detective. An' the fu'st question is, as matters stand now, would they arrest Heckley ef we tol' 'em to?"

They proceeded to argue this question at some length. A more experienced person would have told them that they had no direct evidence whatever against Heckley. There were several suspicious points—points which a wide-awake detective would readily have taken hold of and investigated, but, as the case then stood, nothing which would have justified an arrest.

Jack and his friend, being eager to see everything in a certain light, were naturally guided by their wishes, and they decided that it was the duty of any patrolman to arrest the man from Idaho whenever they said the word.

This point decided, Grimm readily agreed to assist Jack and take turns with him in dogging Heckley. Of course they were to do this secretly, and avoid being seen if possible, but if their man tried to leave New York, they would at once demand his arrest.

With this understanding they separated, and Jack went down-town as fast as the Elevated Road could carry him.

He soon reached the vicinity of the building in which were located the offices of the Royal Bonanza Company.

All was as quiet there as could be expected. It was an hour when the other offices in the building were open, and there was a general stir about the place. Nobody seemed to do a rushing business, however, and the scene was nothing like what one might see on a larger street. Jack had one question to solve before his espionage began. Was Heckley in the building?

There was only one way to settle this ques-

tion, and he went about it at once. He walked boldly in. Just then there was nobody in the corridor. The doors of the two rooms occupied by Heckley were closed. How was he to learn if the Western man was inside?

He went near the door of the office. The key-hole, as he had noticed the previous night, had a cap on both sides. He looked at the transom. There was a means of observation, provided he had a chair to stand upon. He lacked this article, and, besides, it would have been very reckless to employ such means. Some one might at any moment enter the corridor and detect him.

While he was hesitating a voice sounded in the room, singing in a deep base voice. No further proof was needed; Heckley was there. His musical effort was a song of the mines, and was very brief. No conversation followed, and Jack decided that the Westerner was alone.

He returned to the street.

It was not a good place to "kill time" in a natural way, and he felt that his ingenuity would be tried, but he was not discouraged. He sauntered to and fro with an assumption of careless ease.

An hour passed.

Then there was a sudden change in the situation.

Heckley emerged from the building.

Jack at once became on the alert, but allowed no sign to betray him. Heckley paused, looked both ways, set his broad-rimmed hat a little further back on his head, thrust his hands into his pockets and sauntered away toward Fourth avenue, his manner indicating that he was out for an idle ramble.

Was this appearance genuine, or was he playing a deep game to deceive possible watchers?

Jack mentally asked this question, but was wholly at a loss for the correct answer. He was, however, there for business, and he did not allow himself to be left behind. He sauntered after the man from Idaho, taking care to keep well back. Heckley had seen him at Cordova's office, and though he might not recognize him if he saw him again, it was highly desirable to avoid his notice.

Heckley wandered on slowly. He went up Fourth avenue, turned into Union Square, and then paused before the theater and idly read the big-lettered bill of the play. Then he crossed to the square proper and paused in front of the statue of Lafayette. Evidently it was new to him, for he viewed it carefully on all four sides before he was satisfied. Next the electric-light tower claimed his notice, and he stopped a park policeman and asked several questions in regard to this.

Jack was growing more suspicious. This idle curiosity seemed too innocent to be genuine.

From the square Heckley sauntered east and walked through Seventeenth street, and for the next half-hour the pursuit was continued without incident of importance. The miner made unexpected turns at times, taking a course decidedly zigzag, but, despite this, he steadily approached the East River.

Reaching it, he paused and looked idly out over its broad surface. The scene appeared to interest him. To him it was new and novel. He watched with almost childlike curiosity. After a while he looked at his watch, and then started away at a brisker pace, his course now being north.

"It's comin'," muttered Jack. "He ain't out without an object, an' I'll soon see what it is."

Heckley did not look around. Turning to the right after walking a few blocks, he went straight to the river again. The slope of the bank for a moment hid him from Jack's view. The latter hurried forward. He again saw the Westerner, and then stopped short in dismay. Heckley was in a boat, and was steadily receding from shore.

CHAPTER XII.

DRAWING NEAR.

FOR a moment Jack was incapable of action. He had felt a vague impression that Heckley might have come to the place to meet some other person, and the celerity with which the man from Idaho got away from land startled him, and raised new suspicions in his mind.

"He's seen me follerin' him, an' now he's give me the slip!" thought the boy. "He's goin' ter skip away from New York!"

Recovering power of action, he hastened nearer to the river, and swung up one hand to Heckley's boatman.

"Hold up!" he cried. "Hold on, thar; you're takin' a criminal away!"

Both the boatman and Heckley looked back, but the former did not cease using the oars.

"Stop! stop!" added Jack, without any clear idea of what he would do if the order was obeyed. A heavy hand fell upon the boy's arm, and he turned to find himself in the grasp of a policeman.

"What's all this racket about?" sternly demanded the officer. "Be you crazy, or what be you yellin' about?"

"Stop him!" Jack cried.

"Stop who?"

"The man in the boat."

"Rubbish!"

The policeman shook his prisoner roughly.

"It hain't me!" exclaimed Jack. "That chap is runnin' away. Stop him!"

Heckley and the boatman were still looking at the scene on shore, and the boy pointed directly toward them, but the patrolman's heart proved obdurate.

"Come, now!" he replied, "none o' your sky-larkin'. I've seen the likes of ye afore. Want ter git me into a scrape, don't ye? Want me sent up in the goat deestrick, eh?"

The boat was still receding, and Jack became a trifle sullen. He thrust his hands into his pockets, and curtly answered:

"I thought 'twas your place ter arrest scamps?"

"So 'tis, an' I guess I'll take you in."

"You was mighty careful not ter take him!"

"See here—none o' yer impudence!" and the blue-coat gave him another shake. "I know boys, an' I know that man—"

"You do know him?"

"Certain, I do."

"What d'ye know about him?"

"I know he goes out with Phelim Crowley nigh about ivery day in his boat—Phelim was waitin' for him to-day. I don't know the man's name, but he's a Western miner, an' he's taken a fancy to the water, so he goes boatin' now an' then. A perfick gentleman, an' free wid his money. Don't tell me he is a scamp! I know who the scamp is!"

He gave Jack another shake—lighter, this time, for Jack's aggressive mood was past. So was the chance to do anything in the cause of justice. The boat had left a wide gap behind it, and Jack settled down stoically; no use to say anything more.

"Ef he's sech a high-toned gent I ain't got no more ter say. Lemme go, will ye?"

"I don't know whether I ought ter or not," quoth the officer, twirling his club. "You boys are up ter all kinds o' tricks, an' I think 'twould be a good idee ter run some of yez in."

"Allow me ter observe that boys hev ter exist, Mister Officer, an' you can't keep 'em in a bat-box nor a show-case. We must hev room ter sling out our arms an' legs. We need plenty o' oxygen an' hide-ye-gerin, or whatever you call 'em; but a boy who is a boy will never cut up rough. Pack, sure's you live, an' I hope ye b'lieve me. Let's be jolly. Never say die!"

The patrolman smiled. He was not a hard man, and this whimsical address amused him.

He released Jack's arm, hit him a playful blow with his club, and exclaimed:

"Be off, wid yez!"

And then he walked serenely away with the martial step peculiar to the guardians of the peace.

Jack looked meditatively at the boat. It was now well out on the river, and moving upstream. Strong as his impressions had been a short time before, he was now inclined to think that he might have been mistaken. If Heckley intended to leave the city he would, Jack thought, be more likely to go south than north.

Moreover, the patrolman had said that Heckley had been in the habit of going out frequently in the boat with Crowley, and the quickness with which they got away indicated that the latter had actually been waiting for the miner.

"It may be all right," thought Jack. "Anyway, he's out o' my reach fur now, an' all I kin do is ter go back."

He went back. Night was not far away, and he determined to return to the vicinity of Heckley's office and wait to see if there were further developments. This time his patience was rewarded; he had waited an hour and a half when the miner returned and went quietly to his office.

Jack had come to a wise decision while waiting. He had decided that no officer would arrest Heckley until he had more proof to offer. Either he must get such proof, or go to Police Headquarters, lay the case before them, and let them take action as they saw fit.

He had already decided what to do.

"I'll go an' tell G. W. Grimm that he needn't go on watch, ter-night, an' then I'll see how things work ter-morrer."

With this decision he started up-town.

He was nearing Grimm's residence when he suddenly heard some one call behind him. He turned around, and saw two men hurrying after him. He recognized one at once—it was Pedro. The second man was as dark as he, and looked to be a Spaniard, also.

Pedro came up hurriedly and shook his hand, and then turned to his companion, said a few unintelligible words, and made several gestures nearly as obscure. It was intended as an introduction, however, and was duly acknowledged.

Then the second man spoke. He was a friend of Pedro before mentioned, and could make himself understood in English by a quick-witted person, but his English was so bad that no attempt is made here to produce it exactly. Only one peculiarity—his short sentences—is retained.

"I am named Lopez. I am a Spaniard, and the friend of Pedro. Pedro no speak the English language; I speak for him."

"What does Pedro want?" asked Jack.

"Pedro is afraid for his master. He fears his master will be robbed. What do you think of Neil Dickerman?"

"You tell Pedro that I wouldn't bet a second-hand postage-stamp on Dick."

"How?" asked Lopez, with a puzzled look.

"I don't like him."

This reply was translated to Pedro, who first rubbed his hands together with satisfaction, and then looked very grave.

"Is he honest?" continued Lopez. "Is he dealing right with Edward Cordova? Is the Royal Bonanza Mine safe?"

"Now you stump me."

"Eh?" questioned Lopez, more puzzled than ever.

"I don't know how it is, nor what kind o' a chap Neil Dick is, nor whether the Royal Bonanza is safe; but I admit I don't like the looks."

"You think it is a swindle?"

"Yes, but bear in mind that I'm only a boy. I don't want ter be too previous. I hope it is all right."

"Pedro is in despair. He thinks his master will be ruined. Cordova has been warned, but he will not hear. When he saw the Governor of Idaho he was worried, but now he is ill and says he will wait. He has paid Heckley much money. Will Heckley run away with it?"

Pedro could not understand the speakers, but his gaze never wandered from their faces. First one and then the other was regarded, and his anxiety was striking and painful. His devotion to his master's interests was something pleasant to see. If Cordova had been as alert, careful and energetic as Pedro, he would never have put out so much money without knowing positively that it was safe.

"You're askin' me more'n I can tell," Jack answered. "Ef I was Cordova, though, I'd see the perleece right away an' find out ef the man is solid, an' ef he ain't, I'd make moves to get my money back."

This was translated to Pedro, and his reply conveyed through the same channel. It was in the form of an ejaculation.

"How can I make my master see as I do?"

"That's a conundrum," Jack declared.

"Pedro doubts Dickerman," pursued Lopez, "and he thinks Anderson as bad as the others. He asked me to watch Anderson. I have done it."

"What luck?"

"No luck."

"He's a high-flyer."

"I dogged him," continued Lopez. "He went to a house on — street, where, a boy told me, a doctor lived. He stayed half an hour. When he came out I followed him again. He went many blocks, and then met Dickerman. He gave Dickerman a small, blue bottle. Then they separated, and Anderson went home. I had found out nothing."

"Wal, the long an' short on't is, Cordova's only safe way is ter see either the perleece magnates or a good lawyer, an' hev this matter looked inter. Let him go alone, not on Neil Dickerman's advice."

And there the interview ended. Pedro had obtained no consolation, and the matter seemed narrowed down to one point. If he could persuade the Brazilian to take the advice Jack had last given the truth would soon be known; but if Cordova persisted in believing in Dickerman simply because he was his cousin, he would have to take whatever consequences followed.

Leaving the Spaniards, Jack went to G. W. Grimm and informed him that he need not watch Heckley. What would be the good of it, since they could not stop him, if he tried to escape?

The boy went to the office as usual the next

day. Cordova seemed to have got the better of his illness, and, except that he was paler than usual, was in fair health and spirits. Everything moved on as usual. Dickerman came in at twelve o'clock, and he and Cordova took lunch outside.

Barring a slight restraint, they seemed to have renewed their old confidence.

Harlem Jack was disgusted.

When the day's work was closed, however, Pedro conducted him into the parlor, and to the large "cuckoo" clock. Pointing to the characters "IX," he made a series of gestures and wound up by placing one finger upon his lips.

"D'ye mean," asked Jack, after a pause, "that you want me ter come hyar on the sly, at nine o'clock this evenin'?"

Pedro nodded violently.

CHAPTER XIII.

ANOTHER FINANCIER.

JACK was puzzled. He knew, of course, that the Spaniard could not have understood his question, despite the ready and emphatic answer, but he was quite sure that he had interpreted the signs rightly. Assuming that Pedro wanted him to come secretly to the house at nine o'clock, what did he want?

There were but two ways to answer this question. Either Lopez must be produced as an interpreter, or the Harlem boy must come according to invitation and settle the question by experience.

"All right," he agreed; "I'll be here."

Again Pedro nodded emphatically. Then he turned to the clock once more and touched the "IX."

"Nine, sharp. Jes' so," Jack agreed.

Pedro laid his finger on his lip.

"Keep mum, you mean. All right, Pedro."

The Spaniard nodded and smiled, and as the matter seemed settled, Jack went his way. His first idea was to call and see if Heckley was at the office, but he settled this point with a gesture of disgust, and went home, instead. That evening he did not go out until the time drew near to see Pedro again.

During the intervening time he had done some careful meditating, but without result. Pedro wanted him at the house at nine o'clock. It was to be a secret visit. What did this indicate? Clearly, if he had anything to tell he would have called in Lopez as interpreter. That was not it, yet—what else could it be? That was what Jack wanted to know, but he had arrived at no conclusion when he left home.

He went directly to Cordova's house.

He did not know how he was to be admitted, and was wondering how Pedro would keep the secret, when Pedro, himself, settled the first act in the train of circumstances. The Spaniard appeared at the basement-door, his finger upon his lips, and motioned Jack to enter. The latter obeyed.

The gas was burning dimly in the hall, but no third person was visible. Pedro did some more motioning, and indicated that Jack was to remove his shoes. This began to look as though something serious was ahead, and the boy hesitated.

He did not like the idea of any such stealthy work.

A moment later he remembered Pedro's position in the house; remembered how completely he was trusted by Cordova; and determined to see the matter out.

Accordingly, he removed his shoes.

Pedro then conducted him up-stairs. Both stepped softly, and there was no noise and no detection. The Spaniard led the way to the parlor.

It will be remembered that Cordova's office was what is commonly called the "back parlor." These rooms were arranged so that they could be made into one if desired; in other words, were connected by folding-doors. On the parlor side, these doors were now concealed by a heavy curtain of brown cloth, ornamented with gold-work in intricate pattern.

With another gesture to call for caution, Pedro moved the curtain and motioned Jack to follow him to the recess it left behind it. This done, Jack made a discovery. The connecting doors were a trifle ajar, and a view of Cordova's office was vouchsafed.

He saw the Brazilian sitting by his desk.

Then he turned to Pedro.

The Spaniard dropped the curtain again and went through a series of motions. Every motion was earnestly made, and his face was expressive of great anxiety. What he intended to convey was uncertain: Jack understood only a part. He did understand that Pedro wished him to hide behind the curtain, and see and

hear whatever occurred or was said in the office.

But what did Pedro expect to occur?

This was a profound mystery, but Jack had gone too far to retreat. He began to be interested. Mystery adds to all events, and there was enough of it then. The Spaniard, with his sign-language, his terribly earnest face and his strange proceeding, was enough to draw any one into the scheme.

Jack nodded—Pedro looked relieved—the door-bell rung—Pedro dropped the curtain, and the boy from Harlem was "in" for the adventure, whatever it was to be.

He stood in silence and alone. The Spaniard entered the office through the hall-door. Jack heard some one admitted by the other servant, and in a moment more Neil Dickerman appeared in the office. A second person followed him, and Jack stood dumfounded with wonder.

It was Otis Harbison, the chemist-doctor!

Of all men Jack had least expected to see him. What did it mean? Then a terrible suspicion rushed upon the boy. He remembered the room in Harbison's house which he had found so terrible; he remembered the strange articles which he had but partially understood; he remembered the motionless dog and cat; he remembered the various bottles labeled "Poison!" and the various things with which the old chemist had declared he could take life so easily—as well as his own impression that Harbison would not hesitate to do so.

Why was this dangerous man in Cordova's office?

Dickerman introduced them.

"Doctor Harbison, let me make you acquainted with my cousin, Mr. Cordova."

The two men moved to greet each other, and a smile wrinkled the chemist's face. It was not a pleasant smile, yet it was better than his expression in his own room. No doubt he was now trying to make it inviting. He failed, but only because Nature had given him the face of a rascal.

Jack shivered. Why was the man of poisons in that house?

Cordova did not seem to feel any such misgivings. He shook hands cordially with the visitor, and the three men sat down. Pedro, still anxious-faced, glanced from the folding-doors to the visitor alternately. The old chemist, in his rusty black suit, rusty black silk hat, rusty shoes and dilapidated collar, was not a pleasant person to contemplate.

"I am glad to have you two meet," said Dickerman, airily. "Doctor Harbison is a very learned man, Edward. Not being in need of money, he retired years ago from active practice, though he could give many of our best doctors valuable points. He is now engaged in chemical experiments—"

Harbison coughed.

"At times—when his advice is wanted," awkwardly finished Dickerman.

"In plain words, I am an idle man," amended Harbison. "I did not like practicing medicine, for I found my sympathies too strong to enable me to carry on the work without injuring my health."

His audacious assertion dumfounded Jack. That man possess sympathy? Jack remembered the cat and dog.

"I hear that you are a stockholder in the Royal Bonanza Mine, doctor," said Cordova.

"Yes, sir."

"Are you in it deeply?"

"Forty shares."

"I have fifty."

"I wish I had as many."

"Then you believe in it?"

"Do I?" echoed Harbison, with an air of surprise.

"I see that you do."

"Most certainly. I put ten thousand dollars into railroad stock only a week before I heard of the Royal Bonanza. If I had it out, I'd be glad. The railroad stock pays a fat dividend, but I expect to see the Royal Bonanza stock worth three times what we pay for it, inside of six months."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you speculate much?"

"Not I. Do you know what speculation in stocks is? It's gambling with fate with your own money up on both sides; you have no chance to win. The Wall street speculators are in it to a desperate degree; they risk their last dollar, lose it, put an end to their lives, go to their graves in disgrace, and to—let us not say where afterward. None of that for me; not one dollar for wildcat speculations. Not one! I have fifty thousand dollars outside what I own

in real estate, and with this I buy absolutely safe stocks. No wild speculation; no mad risks. I won't put out a dollar except where I know it's safe!"

And Harbison thumped his cane upon the floor.

Jack had a new idea as to why he was there; it was to still further deceive Cordova in regard to the mine.

"Allow me to ask how you satisfied yourself as to that?"

"By personal examination of specimens from the Royal Bonanza."

"Furnished by Heckley?"

"Oh! no; right from Idaho City. I know a man there, and he sent the specimens at my request."

"And you find it 'pay-dirt'?"

"The very best."

Cordova did not seem wholly satisfied, despite these golden allurements.

"The Governor of Idaho tells me that he knows of no Rolling-Pin Valley, and no Gold Pocket, in his Territory."

"Not at all strange. Western towns spring up like Jack's bean-stalk, you know, and when they start they must be named. Twenty-four hours hence there may be a town called Gold Gulch, and a valley called Treasure Bowl—or any other names—where now there is only a wild, barren ridge and hollow."

Happy Jack saw Dickerman anxiously study the Brazilian's face. There was nothing encouraging to be seen there.

"I must confess that I lack your faith," Cordova abruptly replied. "I've tried to believe in this mine, but have not been able to do so since I first had my doubts raised. True, at times my doubts have wavered, and my faith increased, but the general verdict is not favorable. You say you do believe in it. Very well, I will sell you my stock."

"My dear sir," cried Harbison, "I'd buy every share you own if I had the money."

"Perhaps you can find a customer for me—"

"My dear Edward," interrupted Dickerman, "have you duly reflected—"

"I have. My shares are to sell!"

There was momentary silence. Dickerman's face flushed deeply. He had brought Harbison to "convince" the Brazilian that the Royal Bonanza was sound, and the "proof" seemed to have made him more determined to look upon it as a swindle. The plotter was disconcerted, but he recovered his self-possession in a few seconds and answered quietly.

Neither he nor Harbison made any further effort to convince Cordova. Conversation continued on the same subject for several minutes, and the doctor practically repeated all that he had said in favor of it, but it was done in a way which made Jack believe that he was only talking to kill time.

Fifteen minutes passed, and then Harbison looked at his watch and announced that he must go. Dickerman arose and said that he would accompany him, but the interesting part of their visit was by no means past.

CHAPTER XIV.

FROM BAD TO WORSE.

DICKERMAN and Cordova parted somewhat coldly. Twice the Brazilian seemed upon the point of saying something that was in his mind, but contented himself with pressing his cousin's hand and asking him to come at an early hour the following day.

Neil and Harbison prepared for the street. Cordova accompanied them to the front door. It closed behind them, and they went slowly down the steps.

In the meanwhile Jack had glided across the parlor to one of the windows. He had grasped his cap and was half-determined to pass out of the window, which he knew to be raised, and follow them to see if he could overhear conversation of importance, but as they reached the sidewalk he saw some one appear in the area, coming from the basement door.

He recognized one of the house-servants. Dickerman had paused and was looking back.

"Is that you, Todd?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Give him the medicine."

"All right, sir."

Dickerman turned and walked away with Harbison by his side. Harlem Jack did not follow. The servant had disappeared under the stoop, but Jack had not heard the door close; he would not have ventured to go then, for discovery might reach him. But there was more upon his mind, and he stood in a thoughtful, perplexed mood.

"Give him the medicine!"

That was what Dickerman had said to the servant. Give whom "the medicine?" And what medicine was it? What had Dickerman to do with the giving of medicine in that house? and why had the servant come out so slyly to receive such an extraordinary message?

Troublesome suspicions were aroused in Jack's mind, and he stood unconscious of all around him. Then he suddenly started back as though he had received a blow. So he had, figuratively, and it startled him. He recollected what Lopez said had been the result of dogging Anderson.

It was as follows:

"I dogged him. He went to a house on — street, where, a boy told me, a doctor lived. He stayed half an hour. When he came out I followed him again. He went many blocks, and then met Dickerman. He gave Dickerman a small, blue bottle."

No wonder Jack was startled. The street mentioned by Lopez was that where Harbison lived, and the boy had not forgotten the bottles, one large and the others small, which he had seen in Harbison's case—the bottles of bright, vivid blue.

"By gracious!" muttered Jack, "Dickerman is worse than I thought him!"

A hand was laid upon his shoulder, and he made a start worthy of a nervous woman. He turned and saw Pedro beside him. The Spaniard smiled faintly, and then held up his hat, pointed to Jack's cap, and motioned that they would go out of the house.

"Not yet!" Jack exclaimed. "There is work ter do here fu'st. Who gives Cordova his medicine?"

Pedro shook his head, and Jack peevishly added:

"Oh! Great Scott, I forgot; you can't understand. But somebody must. That black-leg down in the basement ain't goin' ter give Cordova any 'medicine.' It's got ter be stopped, but how shall I do it? I don't like ter tell the Brazilian what I think—but what else can I do? Who is ter be trusted 'round here? It's got ter be done!"

Pedro stared in wonder to hear the usually light-spirited boy muttering to himself with an expression of doubt, fear and bewilderment on his face, and began to think that Jack was out of his head.

At that moment a footstep sounded in the hall. Jack hurriedly opened the door a trifle and looked out. Todd had just come up from the basement with a bottle of wine in his hand. He knocked at Cordova's door.

"Jes' so, by sixty!" muttered the boy. "The work is goin' on, an' I've got ter go right in boldly an' put a stop to it."

The Brazilian appeared and took the bottle. Then Todd retreated to the basement. Cordova closed the office door, but Jack made an emphatic gesture to Pedro and started forward. The latter did not know what was about to be done, but he made no objection to the venture.

He opened the door for Jack without knocking, and then entered. One hasty glance on Jack's part showed the bottle sitting on the table, the wine still untasted.

"Good-evenin', Mr. Cordova," he said, easily.

"I was passin', an' I thought I'd drop in an' see how ye felt."

"Thank you, my boy," was the kind reply.

"I am feeling quite well at present."

"You've got yer color back."

"Yes."

"How d'ye git along with Royal Bonanza stock?"

Cordova looked closely at the questioner. He was evidently inclined to make some inquiries, himself, but probably remembered that Jack was a boy and changed his mind. His answer was trivial.

"There is nothing new."

"I don't hev much faith in that concern," boldly announced Jack.

"Nor I."

"You remember the advice I give ye on the envelope?"

"You advised me to notify the police, and have Stephen Heckley watched."

"Yes, sir."

"Why did you do it?"

"To save yer money. I don't want ter put myself forrard whar I ain't got no proof, an' I know I ain't a growed-up man; but I tell ye New York is jest swarmin' with rascals who git a livin' by deceivin' an' robbin' their feller-men. Look out!"

"Thank you, Jack. I won't forget your friendly caution."

"To remember won't save ye. You want ter git up an' go at the enemy, ef I may speak so bold."

Cordova laughed.

"I'll bear it in mind, Jack."

By this time the Harlem lad knew that he was talking to no purpose. Doubtful as the Brazilian was, he was not inclined to meet Jack halfway. As for telling all that he knew, the latter would not; the time had not come. Neither would it do to give Cordova more advice. He was very pleasant, so far, but a little more talk would get him out of patience.

"Pedro, you may pour me some wine," added Cordova, in Spanish.

The words were not intelligible to Jack, but Pedro's movements speedily enlightened him. His resolution was taken in a moment. He, too, moved toward the wine, as though to assist, but as he neared it, he struck his foot intentionally against the rocker of a chair, lunged forward and struck the bottle, and in a moment more it went whirling down upon the marble hearth, where it was broken into a dozen pieces.

Jack gazed at the flowing wine in pretended dismay.

"Great Scott! I've done it now!" he ejaculated. "I'm as awkward as a mule, by gracious! Mr. Cordova, don't say a word, if you please, an' you kin take it out o' my wages. But fur now, jest send Pedro arter fresh wine, an' don't blame me too much."

"Don't say any more, Jack. I don't care for the wine, but, hereafter, let Pedro do his work."

Then Cordova turned to the Spaniard and told him to go for a fresh bottle of wine.

Thus far Pedro was wholly in the dark as to what Jack had heard when behind the folding-doors, but, as to the wine, the boy had given him a few sly hints which were not lost upon the shrewd Spaniard.

He suspected that the wine had been purposely upset, and knew there must have been some good reason for it.

Jack made another excuse, and followed Pedro into the hall. Then followed a most earnest conversation by means of signs. The boy was very anxious to get Pedro outside as soon as possible, and take him to their interpreter, while the Spaniard was equally anxious to know the result of the late interview.

By means of signs it was agreed that they should meet outside at the end of half an hour.

This appointment was kept, and then they hurried away to see Lopez. They found that person just preparing for bed, but he accepted his fate cheerfully and made no objection to act as mutual friend again.

Jack at once poured a volley of questions in upon him.

"Did you say you followed Anderson ter — street?"

"Yes."

"An' that he stopped at a doctor's house?"

"A boy told me a doctor lived there."

"What was the doctor's name?"

"Harbison."

"When Anderson came away he met Dickerman?"

"Yes."

"An' give him a blue bottle?"

"Yes."

"What sort o' a blue bottle was it?"

"Small—like that," explained Lopez, illustrating. "The color was blue—oh! very blue. When the sun struck it, it shine like diamonds. Grand! Superb!" and the Spaniard lifted both hands in admiration.

"Jes' so. Now I want you ter tell Pedro somethin'. Say ter Pedro that the Harbison who called on Cordova this evenin' is an experimenter in p'izens an' other drugs, an' keeps a certain kind o' p'izen in blue bottles. Then tell him that when Dickerman left the house this evenin', Todd skulked out o' the area an' Dick told him ter give somebody some 'medicine,' an' that was why I spilled the wine."

This was translated to Pedro, who at once became very much agitated. He required further particulars, and Jack went into details.

When Pedro understood fully, he told the story of the blue bottle found in Dickerman's overcoat, when the latter accidentally changed with Cordova.

By this time Pedro was trembling like a leaf. He understood Jack fully, and comprehended that the latter believed their employer's life to be menaced. The matter was going from bad to worse, and the faithful servant was filled with horror. He was for the time as weak as a child, but the Harlem boy retained his calmness. He began to see his way clear, at last.

If they had not got a sure hold on the Royal Bonanza matter, they had learned enough about

the blue bottle plot to make a strong case. Moreover, affairs had reached a point where it would not do to remain silent any longer.

Happy Jack determined to call at Police Headquarters that very night, but there was one thing to do first.

CHAPTER XV.

SETTING THE SNARE.

REOPENING the conversation, Jack asked several questions of Pedro, through the interpreter.

"Who is Todd?"

"The man-of-all-work at Cordova's."

"Where does he sleep?"

"In the basement bedroom."

"Where do you sleep?"

"In a room on the third floor."

"Wal, now see hyar, Pedro, I hev an idee that ef Todd is tryin' ter p'ison Cordova by Dickerman's orders, the blue bottle is now in his hands. Kin you git it? Put yer wits ter work, fur this is right-down important."

Pedro did "put his wits ter work." He saw the importance of getting the bottle, if it could be done, and he replied that he would watch for a chance and do his best.

"I see now that I've made one blunder," added Jack. "I hadn't ought ter broke that bottle o' wine, but saved it, an' had it analyzed. I'm right sorry I did it, but it may not be too late. See hyar, Pedro, you go home at once an' tell your master what's up, an' then hev Todd bring more wine, tellin' him the fu'st bottle was broke afore Cordova could drink any. Or did Todd see you bring the fresh bottle, yerself?"

Through the interpreter, Pedro said no.

"Then go right home an' git him ter bring another bottle. Make him understand that the first one was broke afore any o' the wine was drank. When you git the new bottle, make sure that ye save it. Ef Todd puts p'ison in it, we'll catch the miser'ble critter."

Pedro pronounced the idea a good one, and hurried away to put it into execution.

Harlem Jack went in the opposite direction. Straight to the shanty of G. W. Grimm he made his way, and burst in suddenly. Grimm was preparing to retire, and one suspender hung loosely over his hip. He had been just ready to cast off the other, but paused in amazement at sight of Jack.

"Grimm, I want yer help!" cried the boy.

"Eh?"

"I want you ter go ter Perleece Headquarters with me!"

"Way down ter Mulberry street?"

"Yes."

"Bow-wow! It's pretty tough on a man with chronic hydrophoby ter git him out at this time o' night—"

"The business won't wait. Come! will you go? I kin go alone, but they won't pay due attention ter me, I'm afeerd. I want a man with me, an' you are the only one I kin ask."

"Bow-wow! I ain't goin' ter refuse—not ef I know myself. I s'pose it's about Cordova's case, an' I know you hev hoss-sense enough ter do the proper thing. Chuck me my shoes; I'll be ready in a jiffy."

He made due haste, and was soon ready for the street. They took the Elevated Road and rode to Houston street, and then walked to the Central Station.

An officer was on guard at the door, but a few words with him enabled them to pass on. Jack saw a corridor which seemed to cut the building through from west to east. They entered a room at the left, and were in an office where Jack saw several men at work. Grimm did not pause, but passed through another door nearly opposite to the first. They were then in another corridor, smaller and more ancient-looking than the first. Passing along this for several yards they entered still another room. At the further side a space was partitioned off by a bar, and there a stern-faced man was on duty.

Grimm walked up to him and asked for Inspector Byrnes.

"Not in."

Then he asked for Mr. Adams, knowing that he was the chief's right-hand man. He was informed that Mr. Adams was not in.

Jack's face lengthened.

"What do you want, anyway?" demanded the man on guard, somewhat peremptorily.

"We've got a case ag'in' some p'ison rascals, an' we want ter tell about it," promptly answered the boy.

The questioner looked at him hard, but at that moment another man appeared from the passage.

"Here is a detective, Mr. Bobson. He will look out for you," the guard announced.

Mr. Bobson was a tall, dignified man, with a benevolent face, but a pair of keen, steady eyes.

"If you have anything to say, I will hear you," he announced, coming to business at once.

By the time the story was told he decided that they had something to say.

When all was told he sat for several moments in silence.

"I hope you kin see a case in it," said Jack, breaking the silence.

"I can, and I shall take hold of it at once. Stephen Heckley and the Royal Bonanza shall be looked to."

"I'm afraid he'll run away, sir."

"He won't, unless he does it right quick."

"An' what about the blue bottle?"

"That is what puzzles me. I wish that I knew how your friend Pedro will come out in his venture. I hope he will succeed."

His manner showed that he attached due importance to this part of the case.

"Anyway, you can go home now, both of you, but I want you, Jack, to be at Cordova's house at eight o'clock, sharp. I dare say the hour will be early for him, but he must give us audience. Be careful not to give anything away, and remember that I am Mr. Briggs, a man with stocks to sell. See?"

Jack said that he did, and then they were duly dismissed. He and Grimm walked toward the Houston street station of the Elevated Road.

"Them perleece fellers ain't a bad lot," observed Mr. Grimm. "They're sociable, an' ef a man ain't afflicted with chronic hydrophoby, as I be, he might enjy himself with 'em. But when a man's temperature is one hundred and four; his pulse up ter a hundred an' thirty; an' hydrophobic pains rend him almost limb from limb, he ain't got that keen love o' society some men hev."

By this time they reached the Bowery. Crossing that wide thoroughfare, they ascended the "L" steps and were soon whirling up-town. They left the cars together and walked homeward.

Neither one had a thought of danger. They had been over the ground at that hour before, and always safely, and it did not occur to them that their late efforts—especially, those of Jack—might have drawn down upon their heads danger that would otherwise have passed them by.

They were soon shown that danger was abroad.

They had nearly reached Jack's home when they came to where a hack stood by the curbstone. On the other side of the sidewalk was an old shed. It was a gloomy-looking place, but neither heeded it; they were on familiar ground. Jack noticed that a man stood talking with the driver of the vehicle, but thought nothing of it.

Going unhesitatingly ahead, they reached the hack. Then the scene suddenly changed. One of the men seized Jack, and before the astonished boy could make a move in the way of defense he was thrust into the hack.

At the same moment, a man darted out of the cover of the shed and grappled with Grimm.

The latter had been a strong man, but he was no longer young, and his joints were stiff with rheumatism. He had two men against him, and was thrown into the hack about as easily as Jack had been.

Then the two men entered after them.

A whistle was sounded, and the vehicle rolled away.

When Grimm had been thrown in he fell against Jack, and both dropped to the bottom of the hack. Jack squirmed and twisted, and finally managed to gain his knees. The hack was bowling along rapidly. A hand was laid upon the boy's arm with a painfully-tight grasp.

"Be silent!" said a stern voice. "Dare to utter a cry, and I will make crow's meat of you!"

"Great Caesar!" ejaculated Jack.

"You are a prisoner. Keep quiet, and all will be well."

"Who in thunder are you?" indignantly demanded the boy, as he squirmed in vain.

"Your master!"

"What do ye want o' me?"

"Never mind."

"See hyar! I reckon thar's a mistake—"

"There is not."

"D'ye know who I be?"

"Jack Brandrege."

"Fack, sure's you live, but I don't see why I'm sot upon in this way—"

"It is not necessary that you should—"

"I think it is. If I ain't interested, who is? See hyar, let me go, will ye?"

"No, I won't! Keep still, you young rascal! If you use common sense, and don't kick up any row, you won't be hurt; but we are not men to stand any nonsense. We have certain plans, and they are going to be carried out."

"I guess we're in for it, Jack," said the voice of G. W. Grimm, mournfully.

"Of course you are, old man."

"It's pretty tough on us, specially on me. D'ye know I'm the victim o' chronic hydrophobia? D'ye know I'm a mere human wreck?"

"We'll talk of that later. No more talk now. I warn you not to try and give any alarm, for it will go hard with you if you do."

Grimm did not answer. Neither did Harlem Jack, but his mind was busy. A startling suspicion was at work therein. Did he owe all this to Neil Dickerman and his gang? And what fate was in store for the captives?

CHAPTER XVI.

JACK'S DISCOVERY.

HALF an hour passed; then the hack again stopped. The driver threw open the door, and the prisoners were roughly pulled out. They were marched directly forward, and then led in through a passage and a door—plainly, into the basement of a house. Next they entered a room, and the journey was over.

The utter darkness around Jack's blindfolded eyes suddenly disappeared, and he knew that the gas had been turned up. Then the silence was broken.

"You are in a place where you will stay to-night. You are prisoners, but nobody will hurt you if you behave yourselves. Don't try to escape, for it would be useless. Moreover, if we hear any disturbance here, to show that you are trying to get away, we will visit you again!"

There was strong emphasis on the last words.

"And give you what you won't like!" added the second man, warningly.

"Just so. Bear this in mind and be wise!"

The door slammed behind them; there was the click of a lock; and then Jack threw up his hands and cast off the bandage which covered his eyes.

He and Grimm were the only occupants of the room.

The latter hastened to free his own eyes, and then they looked around curiously. They were in a basement room of the ordinary kind, except that both windows had been covered over with heavy boards. The only furniture was two chairs, while a mattress lay in one corner with a couple blankets thrown loosely upon it. There were two doors, but it did not need the subsequent experiment to convince them that they were locked.

"Wal, I guess we're in for it," muttered Grimm.

"Looks like it."

"Reg'lar Bastile, this is."

"Yes."

"Them winders hev got planks on 'em, an' the planks are spiked down. No way out thar."

Jack did not answer. He was looking about in a thoughtful way.

"I say, lad, what does all this mean, anyway?" resumed Mr. Grimm.

"Now you have me."

"Can't be we're abducted fur our money."

"Scarcely."

"I couldn't raise fifteen cents fur ransom, ef the Moors an' Goths o' Barbary was goin' ter chop my head off. The only worldly possession I hev is the chronic hydrophobia, an' I can't turn that inter cash."

All this was for the benefit of a possible listener. Really, they were in a very aggressive mood, and were resolved to get out if such a thing was possible.

Half an hour passed. During that time they had heard nothing in the hall, and they decided that they were free from observation. They then discussed the situation seriously.

They had looked the room over carefully, and had found no weak point.

"I'm afeard we've got ter stay here," Jack confessed.

"Think so?"

"Yes. Don't you?"

"No, sir!"

Grimm spoke with stubborn determination.

"What can we do?" asked Jack.

"Ef them chaps ain't on the watch, we'll dig out."

"In what way?"

Grimm touched the wall.

"Only plaster an' laths here."

But we ain't got nothin' ter dig through with."

The elder prisoner took up one of the dilapidated old chairs and coolly wrenched off a leg. Without a word he advanced to the wall and began to dig into the plastering.

Jack suddenly remembered that he had a stout pocket-knife. This would certainly be better to dig into the plastering. He advanced with it, but Grimm shook his head.

"No," he said. "Wait! That is just w'at we'll need later ter cut the laths, an' it'll come in right handy. Keep quiet, an' let me try this plan."

He worked steadily, avoiding betraying sounds as much as possible, and made some progress. Men can afford to be patient when they work for a large stake, and in the present case it was liberty, if not life. He ground away at the plastering, and soon laid bare a small section of a lath. After that it was easier, and he steadily enlarged the opening.

At the proper time Jack's knife was again produced, and Grimm cut away one lath after another. The progress then was slower than ever, but Grimm showed a good deal of ingenuity, and every minute saw more or less advance.

The time came at last when a hole was made entirely through the wall. The dropping of plaster on the other side did not seem to have attracted attention, and the prisoners began to feel new hope.

A light burned in the hall, and when the aperture had been sufficiently enlarged, Jack thrust out his head and took an observation.

No one was visible in the hall, and he was about to draw back when he heard a peculiar sound on the basement stairs. He paused and looked wonderingly. A moment more, and a cat literally flashed into view, coming down the stairs as though very much frightened, and a dog followed after as fast as a lame leg would let him go.

Jack started and looked keenly at them as they skurried to the further end of the hall, as though to escape some great danger. There was a striking familiarity about the pair. Where had he seen them before?

He was still in doubt when human footsteps sounded on the stairs. He did not remember then that it would be more prudent to withdraw his head; he was too much interested to think of anything but the fascination which the occasion held for him.

Then the man came down the stairs and appeared to view.

Harlem Jack stared at him with dilated eyes. He saw Doctor Otis Harbison.

A more complete surprise he could not have had, for thoughts of the old chemist had not once entered his mind; but there Harbison was, dressed exactly as when Jack saw him in his room of experiments.

Discovery seemed at hand, but it was soon shown that Harbison's mind was on something else. He carried his cane, and at once made for the dog and cat. Then those animals manifested great terror, both crouching back at the extremity of the hall, and the dog whined piteously. The doctor had no pity for them. He descended upon them violently, and aimed a blow at the dog, but both escaped his wrath and fled back along the hall, dashing up-stairs once more. Harbison followed fast after. His preoccupation, and the dim light, had providentially prevented his seeing the hole in the wall or the scattered plastering.

Happy Jack turned to G. W. Grimm with a face that had lost some of its ruddy color.

"We're in the house o' the Evil One's right-hand man!" he gasped. "All is now clear. This is Otis Harbison's den, an' ef we git out alive we shall be lucky. He may torture us as he does the cat an' dog!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ACCUSATION.

DETECTIVE BOBSON was duly mindful of his appointment with Jack, and was near Cordova's house at eight o'clock the next morning. He looked at everybody visible on the block, but the boy was not there. He waited half an hour, and still Jack did not come.

He determined to wait no longer. He was anxious to see Cordova before other visitors arrived, and further delay might deprive him of the coveted private interview. He rung the bell, and a servant girl opened the door.

"I want to see Mr. Cordova," he explained.

"Mr. Cordova is not up yet, sir—at least, he is not yet in his office."

"What about Pedro?"

"He is in the office, sir."

"I will see him."

"But he can't speak English."

"Then I will speak Spanish."

"But—"

"Say no more," Bobson replied, peremptorily. "I am a dealer in stocks, like your master, and my business can't be put off. Show me to Pedro, and I will arrange with him."

The girl demurred no longer. She did not have the least suspicion that she was talking to an officer, and she conducted him to the office. Pedro, who jealously refused to let any of the women take care of that sacred room, had just finished putting it to rights. He greeted the visitor with a smile and a bow, and pointed courteously to a chair.

"Good-morning, Pedro," said the detective, in Spanish.

Pedro started and looked surprised.

"I understand that you do not speak English," Bobson added, still in Spanish.

"St. Catherine!" Pedro ejaculated, "do you speak my own language?"

"In a fashion—poorly, as you see."

"Senor, I am delighted. Few, here, know a word of Spanish, and I am almost shut out from the sound of my own tongue."

"Well, I speak it imperfectly, and have come to talk with you. I come from Jack Brandrege."

"St. Catherine!" Pedro exclaimed, sudden excitement visible in his face.

"Is your master well this morning?"

"He is, senor—praise the holy Virgin!"

"Did he drink wine last night?"

Pedro started violently. Bobson laid a hand gently upon his arm.

"Pedro, I think you are a discreet man, and attached to Edward Cordova?"

"I would die for him!" the Spaniard exclaimed.

"Then let me tell you something. See this badge? Do you know what it means?"

"No, senor."

"It is that of a detective, and such is my business. I am here as your friend, sent by young Jack. I am a detective, and I want to aid your master. Let me ask if you got the blue bottle from Todd, last night?"

Pedro's hands were trembling with excitement.

"I will call my master," he said.

"Let me ask you first—"

"Nothing," was the firm reply. "The ways of this country are strange to me, and I know not how to act. Pardon me, senor, if I say that it is with my master you must talk; I have no secrets from him; he knows all that I know."

Bobson understood that Pedro had made a clean breast of his secrets to Cordova, and he remonstrated no further. He allowed the man to go to his master, and Cordova appeared inside of five minutes. He looked earnestly at the detective, but the latter managed to soon convince him.

Keeping the conversation in Spanish, he submitted the proofs of his position as a detective, and then stated that he had seen Harlem Jack.

"Acting on information received from him," Bobson added, "I visited Stephen Heckley this morning at an early hour. I tried to get him to confess, but he would not. Then I arrested him. I will not pause to tell you what proof I have against him, but this I will say: I should not have arrested him had I not felt sure of my case. The Royal Bonanza is a swindle, and I am going to prove it. Let us leave the subject for now, though. Tell me what occurred here last night. Did you secure the blue bottle?"

"Pedro did," Cordova answered.

"Have you it now?"

Cordova touched his coat.

"It is here."

"Good! Hang to it carefully."

Cordova had been thinking rapidly, and he came to the conclusion that the best thing he could do was to make a full statement to this keen-eyed detective.

He had had a full explanation with Pedro, and knew that when Jack upset and broke the bottle of wine it had been purposely done, because the boy believed that the wine was poisoned. He told this, and then added an account of what followed Pedro's return to the house.

Coming in, he went directly to Cordova and poured out the whole story rapidly. The Brazilian was dumfounded; more than that, he could not believe it. He had had doubts of Dickerman's good faith in the Royal Bonanza matter, but that his own cousin would try to poison him was altogether too much.

Still, he agreed to let Jack's plan, as explained by Pedro, be tried.

Todd was informed that the wine he had brought had been wholly spoiled, and was di-

rected to bring a fresh bottle. When he went, Pedro watched him with remarkable cunning. Todd first flitted to his room. When he came out he carried the blue bottle in his hand. Next he went to the refrigerator and took out a bottle of wine. He drew the cork, and then, looking secretly around, poured into it a portion of the contents of the blue bottle. Quickly returning to his room he hid the blue bottle under a loose part of the carpet, and partially behind the bureau, and then carried the wine to Cordova.

At the moment he stood at Cordova's door Pedro was retreating from Todd's room, bearing the blue bottle in triumph.

Bobson examined the wine and, also, the blue bottle. The last was about half-full of an amber-hued liquid, but what it was the detective could not tell. He consulted with Cordova, and the latter agreed to bring matters to a crisis by summoning Todd. This was done.

The man came in unsuspiciously, but a troubled expression appeared on his face as he saw Bobson. Something about the detective probably roused a suspicion in his guilty mind. Pedro, according to orders, lingered near the door.

Bobson quietly set upon the table the wine and the unknown mixture in the blue bottle.

Todd stared at that in a startled way.

"Caught!" observed Bobson, tersely. "You see now why you were wanted here, Todd. Your game is found out!"

"I don't know what you mean," replied the villain, but his teeth rattled as he spoke.

"Falsel—you know very well. You tried to poison Cordova!"

"No, no!" cried the wretch. "I did not; I swear it!"

"Nonsense! You were seen to pour the poison from a blue bottle into the wine. Why do you persist in useless denials? You are in the toils, and may as well confess."

"I swear to you—"

"Don't! It will be useless. The whole story is known, and the best thing you can do is to own up. You don't want to shoulder all the blame, yourself, do you? Then own up frankly, and put the matter right. Where did you get the blue bottle?"

Todd wiped the perspiration from his forehead. He was not a coward, but there set the blue bottle as a mute accuser.

"If that stuff is dangerous, I didn't know it," he protested.

"Why did you put it in Cordova's wine?"

"I was told to," he muttered.

"By whom?"

"Neil Dickerman!"

Cordova grew pale.

The most important step was taken, and Bobson soon secured a full confession. Todd had once served a brief term in prison, and he had worked for Dickerman and become hopelessly tangled in the latter's nets. He went to Cordova's as a servant because Dickerman told him to, and when he was ordered to put a part of the contents of the blue bottle in Cordova's wine, he obeyed Dickerman without knowing what the drug was.

Bobson had watched the clock closely during this interview. He knew that the chief plotter was expected, and liable to appear at any time. Having "worked" Todd fully, he put handcuffs upon his wrists and sent him to the basement in charge of Pedro.

They then waited for Dickerman, but he did not keep them long. The bell sounded, and Cordova recognized his cousin's ring. He was in such a state of dismay and trepidation that the detective resolved not to delay matters, but bring the plotter at once to the bar, as it were.

Neil came in airily. He did not notice the bottles on the table, but shook hands cordially with Cordova, and acknowledged the introduction to "Mr. Briggs" in a friendly way. Evidently, "Briggs" was not disposed to be backward.

"I am sincerely glad to see you, Mr. Dickerman," he said coolly. "Pray accept some of this wine. Pour yourself a glass and flavor it with—this!"

He held up the blue bottle.

Dickerman stood like one turned to stone. The color had receded from his face in a swift rush, and he stared at the dumb accuser in terror.

"Murderer!" exclaimed Bobson in a thrilling voice, "your sin has found you out. All is known!"

The arch-plotter tried to speak, but his voice failed him.

"Here is the bottle of poison you got from Doctor Harbison and gave to Todd. Your every step has been traced. We have confessions from Harbison, Todd and Anderson. All known."

Still Dickerman did not answer.

"You have run the length of your rope," Bobson went on. "The Royal Bonanza swindle is known, and Heckley is a prisoner. Now comes the last act in the drama of crime. I arrest you for the attempted murder of Edward Cordova!"

CHAPTER XVIII. THE FINAL VENTURE.

BOTH Jack and Grimm were for a few moments dismayed to find that they were in Harbison's house, but they quickly rallied.

They attacked the wall with more zeal than caution, and in a short time the opening was sufficiently enlarged to admit of their passing through. This they hastened to do at once. Neither had any clear idea of how they were to proceed after that, but they were resolved to get out of the house in some way. They gained the passage, and then looked further.

There was a rear door which was both locked and nailed up, and a front door which was merely locked, but no keys were to be found.

They ascended to the "first floor," so called.

This was familiar ground to Jack, who had been escorted along that very hall by Harbison upon a well-remembered occasion. The gas burned dimly, and the key was in the door. Grimm hastened to experiment. He turned first the key and then the knob, and the door opened; the way of escape lay before them. He turned and shook Jack's hand.

"Come on!" he directed.

"Wait," Jack directed.

"What for?"

"I've got an idea."

"This ain't no place fur ideas."

"I think it's jest the place fur them, an' I mean ter try one. See here! It would strengthen our case immense ef, when we perdoce the blue bottle in court, we could show another jest like it got here. I'm goin' up ter Harbison's laboratory, an' see ef I kin git one." Grimm held up his hands in horror.

"Don't think on't. See! day is breakin'—"

Jack paid no attention to him. With quick, light steps he ascended the stairs, keeping sharp watch for danger. The second-floor hall was dark and silent, and he went on once more. The next flight was climbed; he was on the third and upper floor. The hall, like that below, was dark, but from under one door shone a bar of light.

It was that of Harbison's room.

Jack was in a thoroughly venturesome mood by that time, and he carefully opened the door a little. At the further end of the room he saw two men bending over one of the tables. One he at once recognized as being Harbison. But who was the other? Jack looked sharply and came to a conclusion. It was Anderson. They were wholly absorbed in some occupation, and as Jack saw a grayish vapor rising, he readily suspected that it was some chemical experiment.

As he watched, there was a sudden stir close at hand. He started back in alarm, but there was no danger. Out rushed the mysterious dog and cat, and down-stairs they went with what seemed to Jack to be a terrible clatter. He was tempted to flee himself, but did not forget his errand. He looked at the men; they did not seem to have heard the noise at all.

"I'm goin' ter hev one o' them blue bottles," thought Jack, stubbornly.

He had already noticed that the door of the case was open.

He now entered the room, creeping along with all the care possible. Soft, indeed, were his footfalls, and the men watched their unknown compound and suspected nothing. Inch by inch he drew near the case, and still there was no alarm. He reached it; he grasped one of the small blue bottles. He saw that it was filled with a liquid, and waited for no more.

Cautiously he retreated.

Jack reached the threshold and turned for a last look.

Harbison was holding up a bottle.

"I warn you," he said, in an audible voice, "that whatever I may add from this out will be risky in the sense that no man knows what will be the result. Chemical experiments are always dangerous. You can retire, if you wish."

"No," Anderson replied; "I will stay."

"Jest like me—I won't!" thought Jack, and he softly closed the door and glided down the stairs, holding fast to the blue bottle.

G. W. Grimm awaited him at the front door.

"Great land! be you alive?" the man asked.

"Every inch on me."

"The dog an' cat scud out o' the door, a bit ago, like mad."

"Good fur them—we'll do the same. Come on!"

They left the house and hurried away. Day was breaking, and there was more stir on the streets, but they left the house undetected and started for home. They were within a few yards of Jack's house when they heard a sound like the distant boom of a cannon. They thought nothing of it, and continued to talk for several minutes. Then a fire-engine rattled past them. They looked in the direction it had taken, and saw smoke and flame rising above a certain house.

"Somebody's burnin' out," observed Grimm.

Jack grasped his arm.

"Great Caesar!" he exclaimed, "that is Harbison's house. 'D'ye remember the explosion? Their chemicals hev blowed up an' set the house on fire! Come on—let's go back!"

They retraced their steps as fast as Grimm's legs would carry him. When they arrived the firemen were at work, but with a hopeless task ahead of them; the whole upper part of the house was one sheet of flame, and it was clear that it must burn itself out.

Harbison's only servants—an old man and woman—had escaped, but nothing was seen of the doctor. The explosion had taken place in his laboratory, and it was thought he had perished there, but it was a long time before even the daring firemen could penetrate there. When they did succeed in doing so, they found only the blackened bodies of Harbison and Anderson. Probably the explosion had killed them.

It was already past the hour when he was to meet the detective at Cordova's.

He went that way as quickly as possible, and, as chance would have it, met Bobson just leaving the house.

"I see I'm too late!" regretfully exclaimed the boy. "I'm sorry, but—"

"Never mind; you have come in time to hear the news. Neil Dickerman lies inside, desperately wounded."

"Wounded! How? Who by?"

"His own hand. I charged him with the crime and summoned him to surrender to the law. Cordova interfered to save him, asking that the affair be kept secret, but I would not, and could not, agree to hush up crimes like his. I declared that he must surrender, and advanced to put on the irons. He drew a revolver and shot himself. The doctor who has seen him will not yet say whether he will live or not. In any case, my boy, thanks are due you for your shrewd, heroic work in this case. Only for you the den of vipers would never have been unearthed!"

And the detective shook Jack cordially by the hand.

Pedro appeared at the door, eagerly beckoning, and Jack went in. The demonstrative Spaniard actually took the boy in his arms and gave him a hug which reminded Jack of a grizzly bear.

Then came Edward Cordova, pale and sad, but full of gratitude to him who had saved his life, and he grasped Jack's hand, thanked him warmly, and declared that while he lived the Harlem boy should not want for a friend.

The promise was kept. Jack had made a true friend.

The Royal Bonanza was found to be a complete swindle, operated by Heckley, Dickerman and Anderson. The man from Idaho confessed, and the money paid to him was recovered. Cordova lost nothing. Heckley went to Sing Sing, but, as he proved an exemplary prisoner, was pardoned before his time was out. He then went West again, and it is to be hoped he is leading an honest life.

Neil Dickerman died of his wound.

Jack chanced upon the dog and cat upon which Harbison had once experimented, and gave them a good home at his mother's house.

Harvey Stannard was so chagrined at the result of affairs at the office that he resigned his position and went back to the country.

All of Cordova's investments except the Royal Bonanza were found to be safe, and he settled down in New York, but wisely gave up speculating. For three years he kept Jack Brandrege with him, and under the boy's care, honest Pedro learned to speak fair English.

Cordova watched for a chance, and when it came he placed Jack in a law-office. The prospects are good that Jack will some day become famous.

G. W. Grimm still lives in his shanty-home, and though he complains, as usual, of "chronic hydrophobia," is as jovial as ever.

THE END.

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- 245 Merle, the Middy; or, The Freeland Heir.
- 250 The Midshipman Mutineer; or, Brandt, the Buccaneer.
- 264 The Floating Feather; or, Merle Monte's Treasure Island.
- 269 The Gold Ship; or, Merle, the Condemned.
- 276 Merle Monte's Cruise; or, The Chase of "The Gold Ship."
- 280 Merle Monte's Fate; or, Pearl, the Pirate's Bride.
- 284 The Sea Marauder; or, Merle Monte's Pledge.
- 287 Billy Blue-Eyes, the Boy Rover of the Rio Grande.
- 304 The Dead Shot Dandy; or, Benito, the Boy Bugler.
- 308 Keno Kit; or, Dead Shot Dandy's Double.
- 314 The Mysterious Marauder; or, The Boy Bugler's Long Trail.
- 377 Bonodel, the Boy Rover; or, The Flagless Schooner.
- 383 The Indian Pilot; or, The Search for Pirate Island.
- 387 Warpath Will, the Boy Phantom.
- 393 Seawall, the Boy Lieutenant.
- 402 Inodor, the Young Conspirator; or, The Fatal League.
- 407 The Boy Insurgent; or, The Cuban Vendetta.
- 412 The Wild Yachtsman; or, The War-Cloud's Cruise.
- 429 Duncan Dare, the Boy Refugee.
- 433 A Cabin Boy's Luck; or, The Corsair.
- 437 The Sea Raider.
- 441 The Ocean Firefly; or, A Middy's Vengeance.
- 446 Haphazard Harry; or, The Scapegrace of the Sea.
- 450 Wizard Will; or, The Boy Ferret of New York.
- 454 Wizard Will's Street Scouts.
- 462 The Born Guide; or, The Sailor Boy Wanderer.
- 468 Neptune Ned, the Boy Coaster.
- 474 Flora; or, Wizard Will's Vagabond Pard.
- 483 Ferret's Aloft; or, Wizard Will's Last Case.
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- 495 Arizona Joe, the Boy of the Cowboys.
- 497 Buck Taylor, King of the Cowboys.
- 503 The Royal Middy; or, The Shark and the Sea Cat.
- 507 The Hunted Midshipman.
- 511 The Outlawed Middy.
- 520 Buckskin Bill, the Comanche Shadow.
- 525 Brothers in Buckskin.
- 530 The Buckskin Bowers.
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- 540 Captain Ku-Klux, the Marauder of the Rio.
- 545 Lieutenant Leo, the Son of Laftie.
- 550 Laftie's Legacy; or, The Avenging Son.
- 555 The Creole Corsair.
- 560 Pawnee Bill, the Prairie Shadower.
- 565 Kent Kingston, the Card King.
- 570 Camille, the Card Queen.
- 575 The Surgeon-Scout Detective.
- 580 The Outcast Cadet; or, The False Detective.
- 586 The Buckskin Avenger.
- 591 Delmonte, the Young Sea Rover.
- 597 The Young Texan Detective.
- 602 The Vagabond of the Mines.
- 607 The Rover Detective; or, Keno Kit's Champions.

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- 55 Deadly-Eye, the Unknown Scout.
- 68 Border Robin Hood; or, The Prairie Rover.
- 158 Fancy Frank of Colorado; or, The Trapper's Trust.

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